

JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AS REFLECTED
IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE


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JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AS REFLECTED IN
EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

By

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A. B., University of Kansas City, 1937

A THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	Page 1
Survey of Previous Studies	1
Definition of Jewish Christian	2
Problems Involved in This Study	4
The Judaizing Controversy	4
Contributions of Jewish Christian- ity to the Church	5
Chapter	
I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF JUDAISM AND CHRIS- TIANITY.	7
The Influence of Jesus on Judaism	7
The Growth of the Church	8
Similarities and Differences between Judaism and Christianity	12
Reasons for Separation	14
Indications of a Jewish Christian Movement	16
Contributions of the Tübingen School	18
Paucity of Literary Remains	22
II. JEWISH CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW TESTA- MENT PERIOD	26
Reasons Why Judaism Rejected Jesus	26
Growth of Rabbinic Judaism	28
Parallels Between Jesus and the Phari- sees	30
The Sect of John the Baptist	31
Sectarian Movements in Judaism	32
Essenes	32
Zadokites	33
Hellenistic Judaism	34
Sources of Opposition to Jesus	35
Hellenistic Jews	35
Sadducees	35
Talmudic References to Jesus	36
Jewish Christianity in the Book of Acts	37
Growing Hostility	38
Widespread of Christian Communities	39
Beginning of the Gentile Mission	39

The Importance of Paul	41
Jewish Christianity in the Synoptic Gospels	43
The "Jews" in the Fourth Gospel . . .	46
References in the Catholic and Pasto- ral Epistles	47
Reasons for Separation	48
III. JEWISH CHRISTIANITY FROM A.D. 70 TO A.D. 300	51
Jewish Hostility to Christianity . . .	51
Flight to Pella	52
War of 66-70	54
Jewish Christian Church in Jerusalem to 132	55
The Bar Kokhba Rebellion	56
Christianity Recognized by Rome . . .	58
Schism among Jewish Christians . . .	61
Concerning Ebionites	62
Irenaeus	62
Eusebius	63
Hippolytus	65
Nazarene	66
Syncretistic Jewish Christianity . . .	68
Cerinthus	69
Elxaites	70
References in Ignatius	73
Justin's References	74
Origen	75
Jewish Opposition to Jewish Christians	77
Council of Jamnia	80
Sabbath Observance	80
Twelfth Benediction	81
IV. THE LITERATURE OF THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT	83
The Gospel According to the Hebrews .	87
Apocryphal Books	90
Didache	91
Pseudo-Clementines	95
Evaluation of Literary Remains	97
V. JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AS DESCRIBED IN THE WORKS OF EPIPHANIUS	99
Biography of Epiphanius	99
Literary Works	101

Evaluation of His Records	103
Cyprus in Christian History	106
Description of Ebionites	108
Description of Nazorenes	112
VI. JEROME AND THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS	116
Life of Jerome	116
Jewish Christianity at Alexandria	116
Nazarene Community of Beroea	117
Gospel According to the Hebrews	119
VII. THE DECLINE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY	121
Jewish Attitude toward Jewish Chris- tianity	122
Jewish Christianity in Asia Minor	123
Tradition of Armenian Church	125
Possible Fate of Jewish Christianity	126
VIII. SUMMARY AND EVALUATION	127
The Nature and Value of Source Mate- rials	127
Canonical References	127
Gospel According to Hebrews	128
Lack of Source Material	128
The Course of Jewish Christian History	130
Problems for Future Study	134
BIBLIOGRAPHY	136

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

It has been many centuries since Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus wrote a history of Jewish Christianity, describing it as it existed in his diocese in about A.D. 380. His account, although biased and polemic, was among the last specific references to a form of Christianity that attempted to maintain an obedience to the Jewish Torah. In the past century, largely as a result of a re-emphasis on the historical development of Christianity initiated by F. C. Baur and his associates, there has been a renewed interest in the Jewish Christian movement.

Most historians in referring to the history of Jewish Christianity have expressed an awareness of this phase of Christian history, but it seems to be the general opinion that there is little or no evidence which might give us information of the nature or history of Jewish Christianity. In 1894, F. J. A. Hort published a book on the history of ¹Judaistic Christianity. This book is an excellent summary of the state of our information at that time. However, in subsequent years much new evidence has been discovered and many axioms commonly accepted in 1894, especially in the field of Biblical criticism, are now open to new interpretations. Thus, in many respects the conclusions reached by

¹
F. J. A. Hort, Judaistic Christianity (London: Macmillan and Company, 1894).

Hort do not agree with more modern historical studies.

Since the time of Hort only one book has been published dealing specifically with the Jewish Christian history, the work of Harvey E. Dana.¹ This study was written from the point of view of a traditionally orthodox (fundamentalist) scholarship which requires the forcing of many conclusions now generally denied by modern Biblical criticism. Also, this study is inadequate in that Dana limits it strictly to the period of history in which the New Testament was written, neglecting completely the subsequent history of the Jewish Christian movement.

It seems, therefore, that the time is opportune for a new investigation of the Jewish Christian movement.

At this point it seems desirable to clarify the term Jewish Christian. Modern scholars are quite willing to grant the fact that Christianity is indebted to Judaism in many important ways. It has become common to speak of a "Jewish Christian tradition" of revelation, Scripture, theology, liturgies, and of other aspects of the church's history. Orthodox Christianity has always affirmed its Jewish heritage and held it as the center of its core of tradition. The church has always struggled with the problem of maintaining its Jewish heritage in proper balance, and its long

¹
H. E. Dana, Jewish Christianity (New Orleans: The Bible Institute Memorial Press, 1937).

history of heresies is in large measure the account of movements which have either overstressed or ignored the Jewish aspects of Christianity. The Protestant Reformation closely followed a renewed interest in the study of the Old Testament and, especially in Calvinism, there was a conscious attempt to pattern the Christian Church on the Jewish pattern of polity and ethics.

The Pilgrim colony in New England was one aspect of the renewed emphasis on Old Testament religion. Manross says of this movement:

They had come to America, not to found a haven of religious freedom, but to establish a spiritual commonwealth, or new Israel. . . The laws of the colony were to agree as nearly as possible with the legal codes of the Old Testament.¹

Such attempts to revert to Jewish practices are frequently found as aspects of reform movements, as for example, the observance of the Sabbath as the day of religious observance. All of these reform movements are selective and partial and are more properly termed Judaistic or "Judeoid" Christianity.

The basic criterion for the definition of Jewish Christianity is in the attitude toward the Torah. In Hort's terms Jewish Christianity is that movement in Christianity which ascribes perpetuity to the Jewish Law with more or

¹
W. W. Manross, A History of the American Episcopal Church (New York: Morehouse Publishing Company, 1935), p. 20.

less modification. It might equally be called Christian
¹
 Judaism.

Harnack has clearly defined the field of study as
 being applied only to those who held in some degree:

. . . the national and political forms of Judaism
 and the observance of the Mosaic law in its literal
 sense, as essential to Christianity, at least
 to the Christianity of born Jews, or who, though
 rejecting these forms, nevertheless assumed a pre-
 rogative of the Jewish people even in Christianity.²

For the purpose of this paper, we may define Jew-
 ish Christianity as that historical movement which, while
 maintaining and insisting upon loyalty to the institutions
 of Judaism, accepted Jesus as the Jewish Messiah.

Jewish Christianity presents many interesting
 problems. For one thing, it closely followed the practice
 and teachings of Jesus as preserved in the Synoptic records.
 These documents, while written in a gentile Christian en-
 vironment and for gentile readers, present Jesus as observ-
 ing and upholding the Jewish Torah. (Matt. 5:17, 17:24;
 Luke 17:14; John 7:10) The Jewish Christians in loyalty to
 Jesus insisted on a similar observance of the Torah. Yet
 very early, perhaps within fifteen years after the Cruci-
 fixion, the Jewish Christian community was admitting gen-
 tiles into fellowship without requiring their observance of

¹

Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Boston: Little,
 Brown, and Company, 1902), I, 289.

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the Law or even of the rite of circumcision. And the leaders in this radical innovation were Jews: Peter, who baptized the Centurion, and above all Paul, who had been a zealous Pharisee, an opponent of Christianity as a Jewish Messianic cult, who was transformed into an equally zealous apostle to the gentiles, who could insist that "there cannot be Greek and Jew." (Col. 3:11)

It is little wonder that the gentile mission has been seen by some as a distortion of the message of Jesus. One of the purposes of a study of Jewish Christianity will be to see if this apparent contradiction can be resolved. Was Paul true to the Gospel message or did he distort the faith?

Another question which may be answered by a study of Jewish Christianity is that of the contributions of Judaism to Christianity. To what extent, if any, was the gentile church influenced by the Jewish Christian community?

This paper is intended to be a preliminary survey of the history of Jewish Christianity, tracing its origin, course of development, and decline. Primarily it will deal with the references to the movement as reflected in the writings of the New Testament and in the literature of the early church. It is hoped that this paper will serve as a foundation for a fuller study of the interesting theology and practices of the Jewish Christian Church, especially as

it exerted an influence on the development of the Christian Church.

CHAPTER I
THE RELATIONSHIP OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Shortly before the destruction of the third Temple, a Messianic cult arose in Judaism. This cult or sect was one of a number of similar movements in the Jewish nation of that period. Its Leader was put to death as a common criminal, and the small band of his followers had scattered or gone into hiding. Any observer would assume that the leaders of the Jewish nation had effectively crushed this pitiful display, which was made in Jerusalem just before a Passover about the middle of the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate.

Judaism seems to have bothered little, if any, about this movement subsequently. Important events were occurring. Forces were preparing for a show of military power against Rome; and the inevitable course leading to rebellion was crystallizing. A rash Idealist, who had made a premature show of defiance, had paid the price of his folly, and that, everyone thought, was the end of that.

Such was the obscure and unpromising beginning of the Christian Church. Yet, this movement spread rapidly into the Greek world that adopted it with fervor. In a relatively brief time, when viewing the pattern of history as a whole it won the allegiance of the emperor and became

the official religion of the Roman Empire. The Christian Church has survived the rise and fall of subsequent political and economic systems, and today forms the one and only truly universal institution in the world.

Thus briefly and in somewhat homiletical fashion, we may outline the course of development of what has been the most amazing historical phenomenon in the records of civilization. It was unique and unexpected. The philosophers of Greece or the priests of the Roman state cult would have been aghast at the thought of such a movement arising within Judaism. The common people, if they heard of this development at all, would have totally misunderstood the fact that this crucified Rebel would be looked to as the Incarnation of the one true God.

There were what would have appeared to be better and more realistic, even simpler, attempts to answer the need of that age for faith and salvation. The ethical system of the Stoa had much to say in its favor. The mystery religions offered union with the gods and a guaranteed salvation, without the threat of persecution and death, or even social ostracism. But history forces us to look at the fact that all of these failed and disappeared, until now they are little more than historical curiosities.

Historians have been perplexed about the reasons for the development of this Jewish Messianic sect. Volumes

and even libraries have been written in an attempt to understand the cause and course of its development. The phenomenon taxes the vision and the intellect of all students.

In this modern period, we are coming to have a keener appreciation of the historical factors that led to the rise of Christianity. In the past one hundred years our information of that period has been markedly improved by archaeological findings. And for many reasons, we feel that we are better able to gain an empathy with the mind of that period, than has any intervening age. Still, many questions about the rise of Christianity have not been studied or properly evaluated. One of them is in this field of Judaism in which the Christian religion was born, and from which it moved into the Greco-Roman world. We need to know much more about the Judaism of that period, and particularly about those individuals, who, while remaining with Judaism, accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The historical approach is necessary in any attempt to understand the development of an institution. This is especially true of Christianity which has a strong sense of the importance of history as the key point for beginning a study. For, Christianity has shared with Judaism the conviction that God is concerned with history.

Christianity goes on further to state its belief; that at a particular time and place in the world's history,

God revealed himself to men in the person of Jesus Christ; and that Jesus Christ made known to his disciples God's plan and purpose for men. This is the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," (Jude 3)¹ that has been the watchword of the church in its attempts to preserve or reform its doctrine. We need to know first what the faith was, and second whether this faith has been preserved. There are those who would say that modification, interpretation, and perhaps even innovation is necessary and in keeping with the spirit of the Revelation that was delivered; that is, that Revelation through the Holy Spirit has continued since the New Testament period. Others, of course, deny categorically that any change is possible; that we are false to our heritage exactly to the extent we deviate from the pattern which Christ gave to his disciples. There are many reformers who raise the cry of "back to the pristine purity of the Apostolic Age." Is such a movement a reform or is it a retrogression? Is it possible? Is it desirable? These are real problems that face the church today. To answer these, we need to know as fully as possible the nature of the early church, and its solution of the problems it met.

In this light, the history of the Apostolic Age

¹

Biblical references in this thesis are from the Revised Standard Version except where otherwise indicated.

of Christianity is not a dry and academic field for research. It is an attempt to gain an empathy with the apostles who lived in an age not too much unlike our own, and saw their world with a vital live faith in the Son of God. It has become almost trite to point out that the Christian Church began within Judaism, and that it rapidly spread into non-Jewish circles. But the implications and the effects of this origin have not been fully understood. A knowledge of Judaism is a prerequisite to an understanding of the growth of Christianity. One of the scholars of the church, W. O. E. Oesterley, has put it as strongly as to say:

. . . there is scarcely a chapter in the New Testament the full understanding of which does not demand some knowledge of Jewish religion, doctrinal or practical.¹

As the Jewish origin of Christianity becomes recognized, some students attempt to reconstruct Christianity as a strictly Jewish institution.² Others will attempt to deny the Jewish heritage, as did the leaders of the German National Church under the Nazi regime: that Christianity is derived from, or arose in Judaism, was to them strictly a

¹ W. O. E. Oesterley, "The Religious Background of the New Testament in Jewish Thought," A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, edited by Charles Gore (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), Part III, 9.

² See page 3 above.

myth, fiction, or error. These reactions are not of modern origin. It may be an oversimplification, but certainly there is a great deal of truth in the statement that heresy in the Christian Church has been a failure of Christianity to keep its Jewish heritage in proper proportion. We need only to mention the errors of the early church promulgated by Montanists who were among the first of a long list of those who would deny that Jewish background, and purge the church of all such errors. On the other hand, there was the system of Arius that nearly divided the church, and at one time bid fair to become the orthodox expression of Christianity. "The system of Arius was in its principle a re-¹version to Jewish deism." This stress on the transcendence of God opened the way for the introduction of intermediaries and led to a form of polytheism. The attempt of Arius to restore a Jewish theology is an example of an overemphasis on the Jewish aspect of Christianity.

Judaism and Christianity have much in common. We should mention that great Christian scholar Bishop Gore, who has done us a great service in pointing out the Jewish heritage. As he writes:

. . . the Christian Church had its roots deep in Jewish soil. It derived from Judaism its

¹
A. V. C. Allen, The Continuity of Christian Thought (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1884), p. 87.

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characteristic nomenclature.

His word analysis of the origins of the terms common to Christianity and Judaism is excellent, and has contributed much to our understanding of our Jewish heritage. Perhaps we might point out some of the similarities between Judaism and Christianity. A rabbi, Dr. Felix Levy, has made a list that is fairly comprehensive and accurate. He lists many items of similarity: (1) both accept the Old Testament and its teaching as authoritative; (2) the following doctrines are held in common: belief in one God, the Creator, Ruler, Guide and Judge; (3) idolatry is condemned; (4) man in image of God; (5) brotherhood of men; (6) claim to be universal religion (not uniformity of belief but unity of men in recognizing Father); (7) both look to a Messiah; (8) ethical outlooks: doctrine of reward and punishment; (9) bodily resurrection; (10) rites and customs alike in some items.²

However, striking similarities must not blind us to the fact that there are also great differences. Klausner has done us a real service in his analysis of Christianity in his book, Jesus of Nazareth.³ While his study of

¹ Charles Gore, The Church and the Ministry (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1900), p. 32.

² Felix Levy, "Differences Between Judaism and Christianity," Must Men Hate?, edited by Sigmund Livingston (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), pp. 188f.

³ Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925).

In the early part of the century, the United States was a young nation, and its people were full of energy and ambition. They were determined to build a great nation, and they were not afraid to take risks. They were also full of idealism, and they believed that they could create a better world than the one they had inherited. This spirit of adventure and idealism was the driving force behind the early development of the United States. It was this spirit that led to the discovery of new lands, the settlement of new territories, and the growth of a new nation. It was this spirit that led to the American Revolution, and the birth of a new government. It was this spirit that led to the expansion of the United States across the continent, and the creation of a great empire. It was this spirit that led to the development of a new culture, and the rise of a new nation. This spirit of adventure and idealism was the driving force behind the early development of the United States. It was this spirit that led to the discovery of new lands, the settlement of new territories, and the growth of a new nation. It was this spirit that led to the American Revolution, and the birth of a new government. It was this spirit that led to the expansion of the United States across the continent, and the creation of a great empire. It was this spirit that led to the development of a new culture, and the rise of a new nation.

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

Christianity, made as it is by a loyal and intelligent Jew, is unsatisfactory to the Christian devotional feeling, certainly Klausner's insights into the spirit of Judaism, that led to the separation of the two, are worthy of serious consideration. He definitely sees that these similarities, striking as they are, also indicate that there is between the two a difference that made it impossible for them to exist together. He says:

Though Jesus' teaching may not have been deliberately directed against contemporary Judaism, it certainly had within it the germs from which there could and must develop in course of time, a non-Jewish and even an anti-Jewish teaching.¹

The hostility of the Jews to the Christian movement indicates that they felt this difference as something irreconcilable with the mother faith. We misinterpret when we state that Judaism was, at the time of Christ, the fixed, rigid cult of rabbinic Judaism of a later period. Doctrinally and even to a large extent ritually, Judaism at that period was tolerant of its own racial minorities. The hostility of the Jews showed that they recognized something² antagonistic in Christianity.

The fact that the church separated from Judaism, and that this separation was so early, is in itself a great

¹

²Ibid., p. 9.

E. F. Scott, "The Originality of Jesus' Ethical Teaching," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLVIII (1929), Part I, 109-115.

surprise. It is totally contrary to reasonable expectation. Floyd Filson has discussed the causes of this separation in a recent article. He feels that the separation of Judaism and Christianity was surprising because: (1) Jesus was a Jew; (2) his first followers were Jews; (3) the Jews tended to regard Christians as erring members of Judaism. One did not have to renounce Christian peculiarities, if only he would respect Jewish customs.¹ Filson further says:

When we turn to the early church we find no thought of separation from Judaism.²

As we shall see below, this statement must be qualified to a great extent. However, it does express a fact that is important for our understanding of the development of Christianity. This separation from Judaism has had the utmost significance for the history of the world.

By the time of the destruction of the Temple and the nation in the wars of 66-70 and 132-135, Christianity had become so entrenched in the gentile world that it could take an objective view of the catastrophe of the Jewish nation. It could even see in it a divine retribution on the Jews, who had placed themselves totally beyond the protection of God. The strange thing is that this

¹ F. V. Filson, "The Separation of Christianity from Judaism," Anglican Theological Review, XXI (July, 1939), 171.

²Ibid., p. 178.

separation occurred under the eyes of, and apparently with the approval of, the Jewish disciples of Christ. Within twenty years after the death of Jesus, Judaism and Christianity¹ were parting company. The inevitable break was already clearly defined under the eyes of the apostolic college or committee of Jerusalem that, apparently at least, approved the course. This separation, which rapidly grew until early in the second century, saw the definition and development of Christianity pass into gentile hands, and Hebrew² thought ceased to make a fresh and living contribution to it.

Christianity broke away from Judaism: the existence of the two faiths today is proof. However, certain questions must be asked. How soon was this break complete? Were there those, who remaining with Judaism, accepted Jesus as their racial Messiah? If so, what was the nature of such a group? What were its beliefs and practices? More important, why did it fail to win the remainder of the Jewish nation to its point of view, and even fail to maintain itself in existence? Such a community, if it existed on Jewish soil composed of Jews perhaps using the Aramaic language of that day and observing the Law, would have been a group that was most like Christ and his

¹ Clyo Jackson, "The Hellenization of Jewish Messianism in Early Christianity," Environmental Factors in Christian History, edited by J. T. McNeill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 43.

² O. C. Quick, Doctrines of the Creed (London: Nisbet and Company, Ltd., 1938), p. 122.

disciples. Yet such a movement failed to survive. Perhaps many questions about the early history of the church might be answered with a full understanding of the nature and history of this movement. Is it to Jewish Christianity that we may look for the origin of those distinctly Jewish elements of our liturgy, our theology, our polity?

We, of western Christian tradition, find it difficult to accept the fact that Jesus caused hardly a ripple in the seething caldron of contemporary Judaism. There are surprisingly few references to Jesus and his followers in the few extant records of that period. The Jewish records of the period are limited primarily to the writings of Josephus and Philo, although it is now generally recognized that some Talmudic passages may be dated to the first century. The Mishnah, which has been a source book for much study in this field, was written about the year A.D. 200, and we must exert extreme caution in reading back from any Talmudic source to find references to Christians of the Apostolic Age. Suffice to say, the paucity of information substantiates the fact that Jewish Christianity was not considered an important movement in Judaism by the time that the Mishnah was written.

The New Testament seems to hint that Christianity was more popular in Judaism than our other evidence would lead us to believe. It speaks often of multitudes hearing

Jesus gladly, and crowds following him to witness his miracles and listen to his teaching. The Acts of the Apostles, our chief source of information concerning the truly early Christian Church, speaks of multitudes and includes the statement that "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7) However, these groups seem to have disappeared from sight, with but a few references here and there in the literature of later periods.

This paper will deal with the problem of this movement of Judaism that attempted to remain loyal to the religion of its fathers, and yet find a place in it for a Messiah who had come and had been executed. The study of this movement is difficult. Evidence is extremely scanty, for reasons we must analyze below, and contains many conflicting theories and evaluations.

The study of Jewish Christianity began about one hundred years ago in the "new" Tübingen school. Briefly this theory is that the Christianity of the twelve disciples was and always remained Judaistic; that all Christianity of the Apostolic Age was governed by this influence; and also that the Roman Church of the second century was Judaistic in doctrine and custom.¹ F. C. Baur reduced the history of Christianity to an Hegelian dialectic in which a thesis

¹
Hort, op. cit., p. 6.

(Jewish "Petrine" Christianity) was opposed by an antithesis¹ (Pauline Christianity) that resulted in a synthesis (the old Catholic Church of the middle of the second century).

The study of Jewish Christianity would have been more important if the Tübingen theory were true, but it is now realized that theirs is a great oversimplification of the problem. The contributions of Baur and his associates have been of value in the development of an historical approach to the New Testament, but the picture which they draw of the bitter struggle between Paul and the Jewish Christianity of the Jerusalem apostles is probably overstated. There is ample evidence in the Pauline letters and in Acts that there was opposition to his missionary activities and that this opposition was based on the question of circumcision and the observance of the Law. But it is to be questioned whether Paul's opponents were primarily Jewish Christians or Jews. The generally amicable relations between Paul and the Jerusalem Church would indicate less hostility than the dialectic of Baur would postulate. Then too, more significant is the early date at which the opposition apparently was overcome. According to Baur this conflict lasted for one hundred and fifty years,² but it is

¹ C. C. McCown, The Search for the Real Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), p. 91.

² E. C. Moore, History of Christian Thought Since Kant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), pp. 120f.

now fairly well accepted that the "Judaizing controversy" was settled, at least in areas outside of Palestine, much earlier, probably within the lifetime of Paul. The original disciples, the twelve, were Jews, but so was Paul. Yet, we see that even among the twelve the seeds of the inevitable separation were taking root.

The effect of Jewish Christianity has been minimized by many. For example, in that truly great study of Christian history, An Outline of Christianity,¹ there is virtually no reference to Jewish Christianity at all, except in passing in an article by Dr. Easton. It certainly was of little, if any, importance in the thoughts of the authors of that history. Latourette in his A History of the Expansion of Christianity² barely touches upon the movement as having any effect upon Christianity at all. Harnack,³ in his book on the History of Dogma, evaluates the Jewish Christian movement and its contributions. He writes that the church's doctrine of faith, in the preparatory stages from the apologists up to the time of Origen, hardly at any point shows traces of a time in which the Gospel was not detached from Judaism.⁴ "But historical observation, which

¹ E. F. Scott, B. S. Easton, An Outline of Christianity (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1926), I.

² K. S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), I.

³ Harnack, op. cit., I.

⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

the "Liberator" and the "Emancipator" were
the only two papers of the kind in the
country, and they were the only ones
that were not owned by a slaveholder.
The "Liberator" was owned by William Lloyd Garrison,
and the "Emancipator" was owned by John Jay.

The "Liberator" was a weekly paper, and the
"Emancipator" was a weekly paper. The
"Liberator" was published in Boston, and the
"Emancipator" was published in New York.
The "Liberator" was the first paper of the kind
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in New York, and it was the only one
that was not owned by a slaveholder.

reckons only with concrete quantities, can discover in Catholicism, besides Christianity, no element which it would have to describe as Jewish Christian."¹ A later author, Scott in The Varieties of New Testament Religion,² remarks that the idea of the primitive church as more Jewish than Christian is due to nothing else than a false perspective.³ In his entire approach in this book, he misunderstands the Judaism of that period, and his estimate of Jewish Christianity is unique and unsympathetic.⁴ Then he speaks of the "wretched Judaists" who attempted to thwart the splendid mission of Paul.⁵ Such polemics will not aid us in our search for the truth in this matter.

It is interesting also to note that there are those who deny the existence of such a Jewish Christian movement. In Jesus and the Pharisees, Riddle says Jewish Christians are a fiction of the author of Luke-Acts.⁶ Also in a recent article in the Anglican Theological Review, Riddle seems to be of the opinion that the very term is an error; that there were from the beginning no individuals

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¹ Ibid., pp. 292f.

² E. F. Scott, The Varieties of New Testament Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943).

³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶ D. W. Riddle, Jesus and the Pharisees (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

who could be described as Jewish Christians.¹

For those who deny the existence of the Jewish Christian movement, it seems adequate to refer them to the history of the expansion of Christianity as shown in the New Testament, especially in the early chapters of Acts but also in the other books including the Gospels. Also, there is unmistakable evidence in patristic literature from earliest times up through Jerome, that the Fathers were aware of such a movement.

This paper is based on a conviction of the existence of a Jewish Christian movement for some four or five centuries. We will deal especially with the evidence of the contacts that this movement made with western Christianity through the last clear-cut extant reference to it. Jerome, who lived and worked in Palestine about 350 to 375, was apparently the last to see and describe the Jewish Christian movement as anything more than an historical curiosity. It is in the west that catholic Christianity grew and developed, and it is there that any effect by Jewish Christianity would be possible.

We might add in passing that virtually nothing is known of Christianity or any other movement in the area east of the Mediterranean coast during this period. For

¹ D. W. Riddle, "The So-Called Jewish Christians," Anglican Theological Review, XII (1929).

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many reasons, that we must evaluate below, if such a movement existed in the East little or nothing is known of it. Few records of any form of Christianity in the eastern world are known prior to the Nestorian mission. Perhaps the chief of these is the Christian chapel in Dura, which exhibits many phenomena that we would expect in a movement not far removed from its parent Judaism. For example, the chapel with the baptismal font (or altar) the central focus of attention is oriented with some difficulty toward Jerusalem, in the same way that the synagogue of Dura, that occupied another building in the same quarter of the city only a block away, was oriented. The type and style of illumination are similar, and the subjects are much the same. However, there is no evidence in the graffiti of the Christian Church of Dura that other than Greeks used it. All of the inscriptions are in Greek and show Hellenistic names, and the only discovered papyrus of that city relating to Christianity is a Greek version or copy of Tatian's *Diatessaron*. Geographically and architecturally in Dura, the church was not far removed from the synagogue, and we hope that future explorations in Dura and the other centers of the Middle East will help us to understand the church of this period more clearly.

As we study the Jewish Christian movement, there are certain questions that we need to ask ourselves: (1)

What is the nature of the Jewish Christian movement, that is, what are its beliefs and practices? (2) What was the history of the movement? How long did it last? What was its extent and strength? (3) What, if any, was its influence on the developing Catholic Church? It is to be hoped that this study will serve as an evaluation of a field of church history as yet virtually untouched.

As we mentioned above, the last authentic eyewitness reference to this movement is by Jerome, and it was almost forgotten and ignored until the nineteenth century and the renewed historical interest of the Tübingen school. Historians of this movement are few and far between. Hort wrote a study of Judaistic Christianity,¹ but it failed to evaluate many aspects of it. His interpretation of the New Testament mirrors the status of Biblical criticism of his period. We must remember that our present wealth of source material in the recently discovered papyri of the first century was unknown in his day.

It is to be hoped that this paper is the beginning of a comprehensive study of this Jewish Christian movement and its effects. It will be limited primarily to a discussion of that branch of the Jewish Christian sect

¹
Hort, op. cit.

with which the patristic writers were familiar.

CHAPTER II

JEWISH CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

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The Gospels describe the ministry of Jesus to the people of his own nationality, the Jews. The scene of the drama recorded in the Gospels is, with the exception of a few excursions into Decapolis or into the region of Tyre and Sidon, centered entirely in Palestine. We may reasonably assume that most of those who heard Jesus were Jews, with the possible exception of the Roman centurion and the Syrophenician woman. The Gospel of John records the fact that during the last week of Jesus' ministry Greeks came to Jerusalem to hear him (John 12:20f.), but this is not recorded in the other accounts.

We, who look to the birth of Jesus as the turning point of history, are convinced that the days of the life and ministry of Jesus were the all-important period of the world's development. We, who believe that for these few years God walked upon the earth, see in the words and deeds of Christ the fulfillment of the Revelation of God's purpose, and look upon this period as of utmost significance.

It is with some degree of surprise that we acknowledge, that in his own time and among his own people, the significance of his person was unrecognized. The fact

that Jesus was rejected by his own people has been a difficulty for Christians throughout history. Paul wrestled with this problem: Why has the Messiah been rejected by Israel? (Rom. 9-11) The authors of the Gospels record the fact that this was a part of Jesus' own teaching, that he must be rejected, given up to the high priest, and must suffer death. (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22)

It has been a cardinal tenet of Christian theology that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was a part of the Divine Plan which culminated in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. We cannot enter into the theological implications of this at the present time, but we may raise the question: What was the effect of Jesus' ministry upon his own people? The New Testament records many mighty signs and wonders that Jesus did, the healing of many people, several cases of individuals being raised from the dead. If we are to take the account of the Fourth Gospel as of any historical weight, the story of Lazarus was the impetus that led the rulers of Israel to fear a popular uprising centered around Jesus. Multitudes gathered around our Lord to hear him, following him from place to place, going before him around the lake, spending time with him in the wilderness. The term "a great crowd" is frequently applied to the audiences of his discourses and deeds. There is a record

that at one time he fed a group of five thousand in a miraculous manner. Scribes and Pharisees were sent from Jerusalem to hear him and to test him. Partially because of growing popular restlessness and to preserve the peace, the high priest and Sanhedrin felt compelled to bring about his death. Even then they were forced to caution, secrecy, and perhaps illegal acts because of their fear of the popularity with which Jesus was regarded by the people.

To the writers of the Synoptic Gospels there was within Judaism a considerable number of people, who had come under the influence of Jesus and his teachings. This is not so much stated as an argument in favor of the Messianic thesis of the Gospels, as it seems to be taken as a matter of course, as a self-evident fact that needs no further elucidation. One example may be seen during the course of the trial of Jesus, where Peter in the courtyard of the high priest was accused by the servant girl of being a follower of Jesus. Reasons for this accusation were the recognition of the Galilean dialect and dress of Peter, and the inference that being a Galilean and being a follower of Jesus were synonymous at that time. This assumes that among the Galilean Jews there was a considerable number of followers. These we will have occasion to study in more detail below.

The references to the Jewish Christian movement in the New Testament are obscure and conflicting, but before

we attempt to evaluate them it is desirable to review briefly the Judaism of the period in which Christianity arose. First, we must remember that Judaism at the time of Christ was not the religion of the Old Testament. In the centuries following the writing of the last of the canonical books, many changes had come about in Jewish life and religion. These changes may be traced in the inter-testamental literature and show many divergent influences at work. The Hellenistic influences and the reactions to them can be seen in the Maccabean and post-Maccabean periods. The rise of the synagogue as the center of popular religion, and the broadening influences of the Diaspora had made of Judaism a very complex thing. Moore in his excellent study, Judaism,¹ has pointed out that during this period there was no official doctrine or dogma in Judaism. At this time even the canon of the Old Testament was a matter of opinion and dispute. The rigidity of rabbinic legalism was on the ascendancy, but at the time of our Lord it was not without opposition. Indeed, it was combated by the official leaders of the nation and the religious leaders, the Sadducees.

Christian writers, as well as Jewish, in discussing the rise of Christianity tend to fall into one of two dangers: first in seeing Christ as the Teacher of a

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G. F. Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927).

radically new and unique message, basically hostile to Judaism; or on the other hand, the equally dangerous and faulty position of seeing in Jesus only a rabbi teaching Jewish doctrine, that was later distorted into what we know as Christianity by Paul and his associates. This second is the usual position of the Jewish students of Jesus.¹

We may avoid these two extremes by remembering that primitive, that is pre-Pauline Christianity, was not radically different from the Judaism of its neighbors in outward appearances. History has shown, however, that potentially and basically Christianity contained a new principle that made the break inevitable, and this new principle is in the person and teaching of Jesus.

The parallel between Christianity and Pharisaism has been studied extensively.² We may admit that the Christianity of Jesus:

. . . had much more in common with the religion of the Pharisees than it had with the Sadducees or with the rationalism of many Hellenistic Jews.³

¹ K. Kohler, The Origins of Synagogue and the Church (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929); C. G. Montefiore, Religious Teachings of Jesus (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1910).

² C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1930); I. Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917).

³ W. R. Arnold, "The Relation of Primitive Christianity to Jewish Thought and Teaching," The Harvard Theological Review, XXIII, 166.

but Pharisaism as it evolved into rabbinic Judaism changed in many essential aspects.

The Talmud does not represent exactly the religion of even one section of the Jewish people in the time of Christ: it represents the religion of the successors to the scribes and Pharisees themselves. Rabbinical Judaism is the Judaism of the opponents of Christianity as that Judaism took shape after the conflict with Christianity.¹

We must remember this as we attempt to compare the religion of the New Testament with the Mishnah or the Talmud.

But, there were also other movements within Judaism that contributed to the development of Christianity. One of the more important is the movement under the leadership of John the Baptist. To the early Christians, the connection between John and Jesus was evidently quite significant. As we know, one of the requirements of the successor to Judas was that he should have gone in and out with them from the days of John. (Acts 1:21f.) Perhaps Kohler is too inclusive as he says:

All the Gospels agree that the Messianic movement, centered in the unique personality of Jesus the Christ. . . was started by John the Baptist on the shores of the Jordan.²

but at least he points to the often neglected fact, that there was a close relationship between the movement of Jesus and the work of John. Strangely enough John made a far

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²Ibid.

²Kohler, op. cit., p. 206.

deeper impression upon Judaism than did Jesus. We may mention briefly the influences that John had upon the developing Christian movement. Luke describes the request of the disciples of Jesus to be taught to pray as John taught his disciples to pray, indicating that the disciples of John prayed. (Luke 11:1-4) Lietzmann is of the opinion that it was through John that the rite of baptism and the principle¹ of fasting were incorporated into the Christian message. At Ephesus, Paul found men who had known only the baptism of John. (Acts 19:3) Among these was possibly Apollos,² who later came into Christianity. We cannot develop this significant relationship at this time, but we may point to the inferred connection between the followers of Jesus and those of John as an indication that these not too dissimilar movements could have been allowed to exist within Judaism at that time. Neither of these, however, was able to survive the rise of normative or rabbinic Judaism.

There are other movements which indicate that Christianity, at least in its primitive form, was not too far removed from the developing stream of Jewish thought. The relationship of the Essene movement to Christianity has been evaluated in many different ways. Jewish authors

¹ Hans Lietzmann, The Beginnings of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 80ff.
² William Manson, Jesus the Messiah (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 226ff.

tend to stress the role of Essene asceticism in Christianity:

. . . whatever of primitive Christianity is not derivable from Pharisaism may be sought for in Essenism.¹

Kohler also mentions that the apocalyptic in the New Testament bears evidence of the Essenes, who joined Christianity.² Both of these authors agree with the general conclusion now reached, that Jesus was not himself an Essene, but that many Essenes affiliated with the Christian movement and contributed to its developing theology and practice.³ On the other hand Christian writers tend to ignore or to minimize the Essenic contributions. Hopwood speaks of the Essenes as "a body which had little influence on Judaism, and still less on the Christian Church."⁴

Our growing knowledge of the Essene movement at least indicates the presence of anti-Pharisaic and anti-priestly movements in Palestine. This is reinforced by the discovery of a document of the Zadokites (the Damascene covenantors), a sect disgusted by the worldliness of Jerusalem that retired to the desert near Damascus, organized a community along nomadic lines, and looked for a Messiah.⁵

¹ Klausner, op. cit., p. 212.

² Kohler, op. cit., p. 239.

³ Ibid., p. 238.

⁴ P. G. S. Hopwood, The Religious Experience of the Primitive Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 49.

⁵ F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The Rise of Gentile Christianity (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), p. 19.

In recent months the discovery of a hitherto unknown community of similar nature in the region of the Dead Sea further reinforces this conclusion that Judaism at this time had not yet prescribed orthodoxy or orthopraxy. Hellenistic Judaism was also a fluid and a mobile force, concerned with evangelism and with reconciling itself with contemporary philosophy.¹ Another interesting aspect of Judaism was the temple of Leontopolis in Egypt, that had set itself up with a sacrificial cultus similar to and in competition with the Temple of Jerusalem, and had evidently enjoyed wide favor and popularity.² These are examples of the many conflicting movements existing within Judaism.

Upon this scene Christianity appeared as another group, one might say school of thought, competing for prominence and the control of Judaism.

The religion of the pre-Pauline Christians seems to have been that of ordinary law observing and pious Jews plus the influence of the teaching of Jesus regarding the imminence of the kingdom and the necessity of repentance in order to share in its happiness, and plus the changes made necessary by identification of the crucified, risen and exalted Jesus as the Messiah of the divine promise and their longing hope.³

Lightfoot also reminds us that the early Christian Church was regarded as a Jewish sect that adhered to the Law and

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As for example the works of Philo.

²Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VII 432-6.

³E. W. Parsons, The Religion of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), pp. 64f.

to custom but added its own special organizations.¹ This is in general the picture of the church that we find in the Book of Acts. (Acts 2:38, 3:12-26) The identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah of Jewish apocalyptic hope was the one essential element of difference between the believers in the Resurrection of Jesus and those who did not so believe. There was no intention on the part of the early followers to renounce Judaism.²

Klausner in analyzing this relationship points out an interesting fact:

. . . the reason, for the rapid spread of Christianity: only the Sadducees opposed it. The Pharisees saw in it until the later years of Paul only a Jewish sect like the rest of the sects - indeed, a good sect believing in the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the observance of the ceremonial laws. This difference of opinion between Sadducees and Pharisees with regard to the new sect saved the young Christianity more than once.³

Also, as we shall see, it is interesting to note that the primitive Christian Church was generally unopposed by Palestinian Jews - its opposition largely came from the Hellenistic Jews.⁴ (Acts 6:9) Scott is quite correct in

¹ J. B. Lightfoot, "The Christian Ministry," St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (London: Macmillan and Company, 1883), p. 16.

² Parsons, op. cit., p. 59.

³ J. Klausner, From Jesus to Paul (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 349.

⁴ See page fifty-one below.

his statement that:

. . . it is wrong to conceive of the church as breaking away from the Old Israel in order to form a new one. . . So far from regarding itself as a substitute for Israel, its chief anxiety at the outset was to be recognized as a legitimate Jewish sect.¹

In this brief survey it has been suggested that the ministry and message of Jesus, at least until the Resurrection, were well within the confines of a relatively broad and flexible Judaism, and that it would not be unreasonable to expect to find some evidence for a group of his followers remaining within Judaism.

One of the favorite charges against the historicity of Christianity has been that there are so few, if any, specific references to Jesus or to Christianity in the Talmud.² However, when we understand the nature and the purpose of the Talmud this should be of little importance. Talmudic authors were not writing a history, except as it contributed to a specific religious purpose, and therefore omitted many incidents vital to an understanding of Jewish history. The movement of John the Baptist and the Maccabean Rebellion are typical examples of gaps in history in the Talmud.

The search for evidence concerning a Christian

¹ E. F. Scott, The Nature of the Early Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 30.

² Summarized in J. Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 46ff.

movement remaining within Judaism must lead us first to a study of the New Testament. It is our chief source of information concerning the history and the expansion of the early church. These documents, also, were not history in the modern sense with the possible exception of the Book of Acts. Our historical information must be gained largely by inference, and through the judicious application of the techniques of Biblical criticism. Historical conclusions from the New Testament are closely dependent upon the findings of higher criticism and its techniques. With an understanding of the date, setting, and purpose of the book, the historical development and the nature of Christianity in the first century become much clearer.

It seems logical to begin with the historical account of the Book of Acts. While it is recognized that it was written much later than the events recorded, it is generally agreed that the author had reliable sources for his information. In this book there are unmistakable references to a Christian movement among the Jews. Shortly after the Ascension, Peter and John are pictured as teaching publicly in Solomon's Porch of the Temple. (Acts 3:11f., 5:12) According to the Book of Acts, Christianity in this early period was making considerable advances among the men of Jerusalem, and even numbered among its followers some of the priests. (Acts 6:7) The account of Pentecost states

that some three thousand were baptized on that day. (Acts 2:41) If this account is to be taken at all seriously, we must accept the fact that these were all Jews either by birth or as proselytes. Through the first six chapters, the Book of Acts stresses the fact that the Jerusalem Christians were Jews and had every intention of remaining so. The casting of lots in determining the man to complete the ranks of the apostolic twelve is, for example, a characteristic Jewish practice of that period.

The beginning of the opposition toward the Christian movement is to be seen with the records of the opposition to Stephen. (Acts 6:8f.) These opponents of the new movement are those of the Hellenistic synagogue.¹ It is curious that the only passages in the early chapters of the Book of Acts where the synagogue appears, it is as the center of opposition to the new movement. (Acts 6:9, 9:2) However, in this same period there is close contact with the Temple.²

Subsequent chapters of Acts show an awareness of the wide distribution of Christian communities in Palestine, describing the apostolic visitation (Acts 8:5-25) and the confirmation service in Samaria. (Acts 9:31) The author

¹ N. Micklem, editor, Christian Worship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 40.

² Ibid.

was describing a rather widespread and growing movement. A similar picture of numerous such communities throughout Palestine is to be seen in St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians. (Gal. 1:22)

It must be recognized that the author of the Book of Acts was convinced that the Jewish Christian movement of this time was of some magnitude. Also, it is reasonable to assume that the churches of Palestine were composed of Jewish believers. Palestinian Jews of this period were not likely to have joined with the non-Jews residing in Palestine, especially for religious services. The inclusion of gentiles in the Christian movement was considered as an innovation which had to be defended, as for example, the occasion of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-38), and Peter defending his association with Cornelius. (Acts 10:1-11:18) In Acts it is significant that, up to the death of Stephen, the Christian missionaries were preaching the Word of God "to none except Jews." (Acts 11:19)

This seems to set the scene for the description of the beginning of the gentile missionary movement. (Acts 11:20)¹ Here is a shift of importance from the Jerusalem Church to the new mission in Antioch, to which Barnabas

¹ Textual evidence is in conflict as to whether this passage refers to Greeks or to Hellenistic Jews, but from subsequent references to the church at Antioch it is not unlikely that the translation "Greek" is to be preferred.

was sent by the Jerusalem Church. It was for assistance in this work that Barnabas called Paul from his retirement in Tarsus. At Antioch the name Christian was applied to the new movement. (Acts 11:26) Although the Christian community in Antioch had begun an independent existence, there are many later examples where Christianity is considered as being a part of Judaism. In Philippi, Paul and Timothy were brought to trial with the charge, "'These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city'." (Acts 16:20) At Corinth the proconsul Gallio, considering the charges of the Jews as an internal theological dispute, refused to hear the charges against Paul. (Acts 18:15) This official identification of Christianity, as a movement within Judaism, was of tremendous importance in protecting the early Christian missionaries under the legal benefits of Judaism. It greatly simplified and facilitated the spread of the Christian message.

Throughout the Book of Acts there is a growing sense of Jewish hostility to the new movement, but it is never denied that Jewish Christians were continuing in existence and were indeed a movement of considerable size. Paul and the churches he founded continued to look to Jerusalem as the spiritual center of the church, and apparently for most of this time the Jerusalem Christians were able to continue their existence with only occasional disturbances.

In the account of Paul's arrest during his last visit to Jerusalem, it is specifically pointed out that it was the Jews from Asia who were responsible for his arrest. (Acts 21:27, 24:18) The Jerusalem Church was apparently living in peace and was of considerable size. (Acts 21:20) It was for the sake of the Jewish Christians that Paul entered the Temple to demonstrate his personal allegiance to the Law.

It is difficult to evaluate the role of Paul in the development of Jewish Christianity. There are few today, who would accept the dialectic of the Tübingen School and consider Pauline Christianity as the antithesis of an apostolic Jewish thesis. Yet, it is under Paul and his associates that the break between Judaistic and gentile Christianity took form. Few today doubt that Paul was personally a devout Jew. To do so is to deny the evidence of the New Testament.

Jewish writers have generally been prejudiced against Paul even when they attempt to deal favorably with Jesus. For example, Kohler is of the opinion that there is little evidence that Paul was even a Jew, but his arguments are unconvincing.¹ Klausner has traced the Jewish traits in Paul,² and it is his conclusion that both

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Kohler, *op. cit.*, pp. 261f.

²J. Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), pp. 383ff.

Jesus and Paul were Pharisees and Jews, but that Paul was¹ the more rabbinical.

In addition to Paul's own claims to membership in the Jewish nation, his work exhibits many evidences of Palestinian rabbinism. His theological conceptions are typically rabbinical (Rom. 5:12-14, 8:1-11; I Cor. 10:1-4), as is his method of argument that bears a close resemblance to the logical discourses of the Mishnah. (Rom. 9:2-5; II Cor. 3:12-15) His Biblical interpretations indicate that Paul was a product of Palestinian rabbinism. (I Cor. 9:9-10; Gal. 3:16, 4:21-31)

It was with Paul that the gentile mission came into the prominence that it was to hold in subsequent history. There are hints of earlier missions to the gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11:19ff.), but even Paul did not begin to preach directly to the gentiles until in each city the Christ Messiah had definitely been rejected by the Jews, and he had been driven from the synagogues. In his great theological work, his Epistle to the Romans, this fact of the rejection by the Jews was shown as a bitter blow to his national pride. Paul, while in the heat of the Judaizing controversy, does not seem to deny the fact that for the Jew both the Law and the Messiah are divinely ordained.

¹
Ibid., p. 583.

Gentiles may not be required to accept the Law but that is no license for antinomianism among Jewish Christians. Paul is aware of and agreeable to the Christian movement as it existed within Judaism. (Gal. 5:3) He also acknowledged that Peter and the Jerusalem apostles were the valid ministers to the circumcision as he was to the uncircumcision. But, he is aware of the fact that the Christian movement within Judaism was not a major movement, nor was it likely to become so in the near future. His attempts to explain this rejection in the first part of the Epistle to the Romans indicate his difficulty with this fact.

The Synoptic Gospels contain numerous references to the Jewish believers in the Christ. This is especially significant, as we remember the relatively late date of their composition and place of writing. The Jewish Christian movement is not described as such, but it is implicit in the Synoptics and is nowhere denied. It has been mentioned above that large crowds are described as surrounding Jesus, and that the multitudes heard him gladly. The disciples were sent throughout the region, and returned with reports of their successful preaching missions. (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6, 10:17) Passages that describe Jesus' acceptance and defense of the Law, and the anti-gentile commissions and charges, all point to Gospel sources that reflect the ideas of Jewish Christianity. Some passages

apparently set up Jesus in opposition to John the Baptist, in which Jesus is represented as advocating a lenient legalism opposed to the more rigorous interpretation of John. (Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33) This is apparently in the nature of one of the "rabbinic pairs" that were idealized in the Talmud.

In some variant readings between the Gospels, there is evidence to support the theories that the differences reflect the different needs of the Jewish and gentile hearers. Luke's Beatitudes (Luke 6:20ff.) are more simple and original than those of Matthew (Matt. 5:3ff.), and it may be that Kohler is correct in inferring that the Lukan source had in mind the older Jewish Christians, the Ebion-¹ites. Another such example is the additional provision in Mark allowing a woman to divorce her husband (Mark 10:12), that is in contrast to the more Jewish situation visualized in Matthew. (Matt. 5:32, 19:9) The apocalyptic of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark (Matt. 24; Mark 13) are² apparently strongly Judaic in tone. Hebraisms in the Gospels have led some to feel that they may have been written³ originally in Aramaic. While this is generally discounted,

¹Kohler, op. cit., p. 219.

²Ibid., p. 239.

³C. C. Torrey, Documents of the Primitive Church (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), The Four Gospels (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933), "The Aramaic Origin of the Gospel of John," The Harvard Theological Review XVI (October, 1923), 305-344.

there is considerable evidence of Aramaic construction and thought forms, that indicate a Semitic transmission of the oral tradition through a Jewish Christian movement.

The Gospel of Matthew has been seen by many as a manual of this Jewish Christian Church. Robinson has stated that the author of Matthew was a Christian rabbi.¹ Kilpatrick has studied the Jewishness of Matthew in detail, and it is his opinion that the church in which it was written was Greek speaking, but strongly Jewish in character opposing the aggressive Pharisaic Judaism that was active in this period.² He later points out that the fact that Matthew is more Jewish does not necessarily mean that it is more primitive. It is his theory that Matthew is a product of a re-Judaization not a retention of Judaism, and its resemblance to the Talmud is a proof of its later date.³ The conclusion that the Semitic background of Matthew is Hebrew rather than Aramaic, as postulated by Kilpatrick, is important because it implies a tradition, an academic knowledge of Hebrew, rather than a living awareness of Palestinian Judaism. It is generally agreed that Matthew does show numerous traces of Jewish thought forms and instances

¹ T. H. Robinson, The Gospel of Matthew (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. xi.

² G. D. Kilpatrick, The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 7.

³ Ibid., p. 103.

that reflect the practice and belief of the Jewish Christians.

These Hebraisms are to be found in all of the Synoptics.

One cannot fail to notice how thoroughly Hebraic the Gospel narrative found in St. Luke is. No one . . . can fail to perceive that the opening narratives of the Gospel are Hebraic. They can be translated into Hebrew almost at sight.¹

Many have seen, in the opening canticles of Luke, hymns of the Jewish Christian Church, and they do bear close parallels with hymn patterns of Judaism of that time.

When we come to the Fourth Gospel there is a different atmosphere. In the Gospel according to St. John there is a striking anti-Semitic attitude. The difference is dogmatic. The Jews refuse to recognize Jesus' divine Sonship and are excluded from the Covenant: they are not sons of Abraham, but are sons of the devil. (John 8:39ff.) Kohler has advanced the plausible idea that one:

. . . can only account for this writer's extreme hatred of the Jewish people by assuming that it was dictated by his animosity against the Judeo-Christian Church, which was still strong enough to oppose Paulinianism while firmly adhering to pure Jewish monotheism and the Mosaic Law.²

We shall see below that evidence points to a continued Jewish Christian movement in Asia, the source of the

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²Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 24.

Kohler, op. cit., p. 270.

Fourth Gospel, that continued strong long after the Apostolic period. One does not become bitter in defending a position unless it is attacked, and the tone of the Johanne corpus would seem to indicate that its anti-Semitic spirit was a pro-Pauline defense against the Jewish Christians of Asia.

Little need be said of the remaining literature of the New Testament. The Epistle to the Hebrews has posed some problems. It was at one time accepted as a letter addressed to the Jewish Christians of Palestine,¹ but most modern scholarship is of the opinion that its anachronisms and errors reflect gentile author and destination.

On the other hand, the Epistle of James and First Peter could easily have been written in and by the Jewish Christian movement. The Letter of James especially would have been at home in a Palestinian church.

It is generally agreed that the earliest Christians were Jews.

The first Christians did not think of themselves as a separate religious organization from Israel, but as that part of Israel which was redeemed, and, consequently was to enjoy the Kingdom.²

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Hort, *op. cit.*, pp. 156f.

²J. B. Bernardin, "The Church in the New Testament," *Anglican Theological Review*, XXI (July, 1939), 157.

The Jewish scholar Kaufmann Kohler writes:

All the more strenuously did those of the Jerusalem Church for a long time adhere to their Jewish views and customs under the guidance of the apostles, opposing with all their might the attempts at breaking the Law.¹

Yet, how soon was the transformation into gentile Christianity effected? And how complete was the change? Was there a Christian movement left within Judaism? And if so, what was its nature and its role?

History has proved that a fundamental difference developed between Judaism and Christianity quite early.

Many authors have identified this difference as being not primarily an attitude toward the Law but toward the principle of revelation as shown by the Incarnation. R. Travers Herford has stated that the difference between the Pharisees and Jesus:

' . . . is that one is worked out in terms of an idea and the other in terms of a person. Therein lies the deepest root of the fundamental difference between Christianity and Judaism, a difference which nothing can obliterate.'²

Herford also notes that it is the relationship with and attitude toward a person that force Christianity and

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Kohler, op. cit., p. 242.

2As cited in Frank C. Porter, "The Problem of Things New and Old in the Beginnings of Christianity," Journal of Biblical Literature, XLVIII Part I (1929), 20.

Judaism to part company.¹ A polemic Jewish writer has truly stated that the Incarnation is utterly inconceivable and shocking to Judaism, but it is the essence of Christianity.² Scott has summed up this difference by saying:

On the strength of this conviction (of the Resurrection) they (the disciples) built the church. . . . It was in those first days that the church not only came into being but assumed the character which it was ever afterwards to bear.³

The evidence of the New Testament seems to indicate that Christianity was a movement of some size in Palestine among the Jews. The Jerusalem Church of this period is pictured as of considerable size and importance. Its leaders were the accepted heads of the entire movement. Also in this time, there were Christian groups throughout Palestine especially in Judea. This is the picture that one would get from a study of the Gospel of Mark alone. He mentions Galilee a dozen times as the center of the ministry around the Galilean Lake. Grant notes that there are Galilean Christians today who claim to be descendants of the early bishops, saints, and martyrs.⁴ The differences between the Jerusalem and the Galilean Christians will be

¹ R. Travers Herford, Christianity in Talmud and Midrash (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), p. 16.

² T. Weiss-Rosmarin, Judaism and Christianity: The Differences (New York: Jewish Book Club, 1943), p. 21.

³ Scott, op. cit., pp. 55ff.

⁴ F. C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 141.

investigated below.

The disciples, however, early recognized that the world mission of Christianity made it incompatible with some of the basic convictions of Judaism. Peter, in his visions that led him to the house of Cornelius, was aware of this. Barnabas, in accepting the leadership of the radically new movement in Antioch, also accepted this fact. Then, Paul brought it to its ultimate conclusion. Among the gentiles the Christian message took a firm hold.

For many reasons, political, theological, psychological, gentile Christianity became the dominant movement, and Jewish Christianity was driven more and more into the background until now it has been virtually forgotten.

The difference is that the whole history of Judeo-Christianity is but little known and it is chiefly through Paul's Epistles, particularly the Galatians, that we obtain glimpses of it.¹

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Kohler, op. cit., p. 242.

CHAPTER III

JEWISH CHRISTIANITY FROM A.D. 70 TO A.D. 300

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The church, as it was pictured in the Synoptic Gospels, was a movement within the general stream of Jewish thought. It was accepted for the most part by Palestinian Jews, but from the earliest period it was looked upon with disfavor by the Jews of Hellenistic inclination. The Sadducees, the ruling party of Jewish religious and political life at this time, were looked upon by rabbinic authors as the hellenizing party within the nation ready and willing to compromise with their gentile overlords. Our Synoptic Gospels agree that it was the Sadducees who brought about the death of Jesus. There are instances of at least friendly relationships between Jesus and the Pharisees. Luke 13:31 says, "At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'"

By the time the Fourth Gospel had been written, however, the picture was changed: it was the Jews as a nation that had rejected Jesus. There are many introductory problems of the Fourth Gospel in the realm of higher criticism which bear upon this question. Was the terminology of the author accurate? Was there a propagandizing Jewish Christian movement? At any event, the author

recognized the impassible gulf that existed between Jews and Christians at the time this book was written.

By the beginning of the second century there was a clear-cut cleavage between gentile Christians and Judaism, and the Jewish Christians were torn between these conflicting forces. Their attempted compromise resulted in their exclusion from both movements.

The history of Jewish Christianity has several important landmarks. The first historical fact is the flight to Pella. This overt act, that crystallized the break of Jewish Christianity from its parent Judaism, was the flight of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem to the village of Pella beyond the Jordan. Little is known of this migration beyond the fact of its occurrence, which is recorded in Eusebius.¹ Hort has summed this up as he says:

. . .the fact of the migration is nearly all that we really know about it. That Ebionite communities existed in that region in the fourth century is no evidence that they were descendants from the fugitives from Jerusalem.²

This migration occurred as a result of the persecution in which occurred the death of James the brother of the Lord,³ A.D. 62. This persecution, we may also note, was

¹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, III 5.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20, 200; Eusebius, *op. cit.*, II 23, 428.

condemned by the Pharisees but was instigated and carried¹ out by the Hellenizing party of the Sadducees. It is significant that Pella at that time was a gentile city in the Trans-Jordan region opposite Samaria, and was bitterly² hated by the Jews. This flight occurred in A.D. 68 in³ the middle of the Jewish rebellion of A.D. 66-70, and removed the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem just before the siege and destruction of A.D. 70. It was regarded as treason and cowardice by the nationalistic party.

There is every reason to believe that some of the Jewish Christians returned to Jerusalem after that war. It is also reasonable to suppose that it was not a mass movement of all of the Christians of Jerusalem. There is evidence that the Jerusalem Church continued until the final destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 135.

Another effect of the migration to Pella was to introduce Jewish Christians to the Jewish sectarian groups⁴ of that area. In this Trans-Jordan region, there were numerous quasi-orthodox or unorthodox Jewish communities, and also, as we will point out below, various gnostic sects

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Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 243.

²Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 2, 458.

³There is no evidence of a second flight to Pella in 135 as recorded in Jack Finegan, Light from the Ancient Past (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 231.

⁴Justin, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 80; Hegesippus in Eusebius, op. cit., IV 22, 7.



that undoubtedly contributed to the syncretistic tendencies which seemed to affect later Jewish Christianity. The position of the Jewish Christians in Pella was impossible.

Filson has stated:

The group centered at Pella could exercise no notable force upon either Jews or Christians. This group which sought to be both a strict practicing Jewish group and at the same time a Christian group loyal to Jesus, which sought to be loyal both to the tradition and to him who was a critic of the tradition, which sought to be loyal both to the Torah as authoritative and to Jesus as authoritative, was isolated and reduced to futility. It occupied an illogical and ultimately impossible position.¹

Lietzmann, after his discussion of this event, also states of the Pella community, "It sank to oblivion in the lonely deserts of East Jordan."²

The Jewish War of A.D. 66-70 is an important event in the development of Christianity, and especially of the Jewish Christian movement. The Jewish War served as a dividing line: up to this time it was still possible to be a Christian and remain with Judaism. Likewise up to A.D. 64 at any rate, the Roman government looked on Christians as Jews and to be treated as Jews.³ It was at about this time certainly that Christianity developed its own self-conscious independence, and there are some evidences

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Filson, op. cit., p. 185.

²Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 243

³Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 122.

that it was being so recognized by others. In The Chronicle of Sulpicius Severus, who describes the siege and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the decision of Titus that Jerusalem and the Temple should be destroyed, it says:

Thus, two evil things, Judaism and Christianity, might be more completely extirpated.¹

Following the Jewish Rebellion of 66-70, there was a period of relative peace in which the Jerusalem Church continued to exist, but with evidence of a growing cleavage from their Jewish brothers. As Kilpatrick points out, throughout Matthew the use of the term "their synagogues" automatically shows that the Christians of the Gospel were excluded from the Pharisaic synagogues, and looked upon them almost as an alien institution.²

If we can accept the episcopal lists of Eusebius, the Church of Jerusalem continued under Jewish bishops up to the war of Bar Kokhba, A.D. 132-135, after which the church in Aelia was under Greek leadership.³ Eusebius states:

For at that time the whole church under them consisted of faithful Hebrews, who continued from the time of the apostles, until the siege.⁴

¹

As cited in A. C. Headlam, The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1920), p. 93.

²Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 110.

³Eusebius, op. cit., IV 5; V 12.

⁴Ibid., IV 5.

Following this Eusebius names the Jewish bishops. There are also evidences of persecutions in that period. Moreover when Simeon suffered martyrdom, (A.D. 107), a certain Jew named Justus, who is one of the many thousands of the circumcision who by that time had believed on Christ, succeeded to the throne of the bishopric in Jerusalem.¹ In this period, evidence indicates that the Jewish Christian Church was not limited to Jerusalem. Eusebius mentions other Jewish bishops in Palestine.²

The "caliphate," continuing through the relatives of the Lord, continued to have some role in Jewish Christianity. The influence of the family of Jesus Christ did not end with the death of his brother, James. The other brethren and their relatives were called desposyni (belonging to the Lord), and Africanus states that they preserved their own records, "the book of daily records."³ The last mention of the brethren is from Hegesippus who says that Domitian sent for the grandchildren of Jude, the Lord's brother, and Hegesippus tells of their journey to Rome and their return.⁴ By this time the kinsmen of Jesus were found to be poor villagers of Galilee.

The disastrous war of Bar Kokhba made the break

¹Eusebius, op. cit., III 35.

²Ibid., V 25.

³As quoted Ibid., I 7.

⁴As quoted Ibid., III 32; IV 22.

complete. In the Bar Kokhba Rebellion, the Christians, because they would not join the rebellion and denied the messiahship of Kokhba, were cruelly punished for refusing to blaspheme Jesus.¹ When Hadrian at the end of the war made Jerusalem a thoroughly heathen city and called it Aelia, there was a new Christian Church under a gentile bishop named Marcus. From this time on the Jews were implacable enemies of the Christians.² Kilpatrick says that by A.D. 135:

For Christians, Jews, and the Roman government alike, Christianity was a third race, as distinct from Judaism as it was from paganism. This meant that the Church could no longer use the life and institutions of Judaism as common property.³

Our knowledge of this war comes in large part⁴ from Eusebius who used the records of Aristo of Pella, who possibly may have been a Jewish Christian of the Trans-Jordan. At least he was associated with the community of Pella. Hort is of the opinion that Aristo proved by his interpretation of Genesis 1:1 that he believed Jesus the Son of God was pre-existent to creation,⁵ and that therefore Aristo cannot have been a mere Ebionite. We must point

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Justin, The First Apology, 31.

²Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 179.

³Kilpatrick, op. cit., p. 122.

⁴Eusebius, op. cit., IV 2-6.

⁵Hort, op. cit., p. 177.

out here, however, that our knowledge of the theology of the Jewish Christian community of that period is so fragmentary that such a conclusion is not too convincing. Aristo does show that there were Christians living in Pella at this time, and his records of the war, as preserved in Eusebius, are of a great help to us in understanding this period.

Moore has evaluated the war of Bar Kokhba as he writes:

The war had one incidental result of which mention must be made. . . it brought about the final separation of the Nazarenes from the rest of the Jews. Hitherto these 'disciples of Jesus the Nazarene' had been a conventicle within the synagogue, rather than a sect. Their peculiarity was the belief that the Messiah. . . had appeared. . . .¹ For the rest they were pious and observant Jews.

About this time also, as we have inferred above, the Roman government and the gentile Christians were aware of their uniqueness. By A.D. 108 at the time of the death of Ignatius, Foakes-Jackson concludes that Judaism is re-
garded by orthodox Christians as an entirely alien religion.² Pliny, in his letter to the emperor, also seems to be aware that in Bithynia at this time, c. A.D. 110, the Christians were a unique and separate group. Christianity had become an illegal religion. It is probable that the Christian movement had incurred opposition and hostility earlier under the emperor Nero. Evidence indicates that at this time

¹ Moore, op. cit., I, 90.

² Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 176.

at least in Rome, there was an awareness of a difference between Christianity and Judaism. As early as A.D. 65-70 Christianity may have been officially declared to be illegal.

There is also some evidence of Jewish Christianity existing in some strength in other parts of the ancient world. Possibly the early Roman Church began as a Jewish institution, but it is now generally agreed that the origin and founding of the Roman Church is unknown. It is not Pauline as proven by St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, but his Letter would certainly infer that there were Jewish Christians in the Christian community there. One interesting account of the origin of the Roman Church is preserved in the work of Ambrosiaster:

'It is known that Jews lived at Rome in apostolic times, because they were subjects of the Roman Empire. Those of them who had become Christians passed on to the Romans the message that they should profess Christ and keep the law. . . Without seeing displays of mighty works, or any one of the apostles, they accepted the faith of Christ, though with Jewish rites.'¹

There has remained a constant element of Judaistic thought in the Roman Church. The first preserved work of the Church of Rome, the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,

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Ambrosiaster as quoted in C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. xxvii.

shows strikingly Jewish influences.¹ The legalism of Jewish Christianity would have been congenial to the Roman mind, and has been of influence in the Roman attitude toward law. However, the Church of Rome did not remain or never developed fully into a typically Jewish Christian community because of its early inclusion of the gentiles. Dodd has said of the Church of Rome:

All that we can legitimately infer is that, like most churches outside Palestine, it was of mixed Jewish and Gentile membership, and that Jewish influence was probably stronger than it would have been in a church planted by Paul himself.²

In other areas our information is even less clear. Eusebius states that Pantaenus found Christians in India (southern Arabia?), who used a Hebrew version of Matthew.³ In all likelihood these were Jewish Christians. There is no evidence that Jewish Christians existed in Alexandria. Harnack states that it is possible but is not certain. Certainly the great Alexandrian theologians have little if anything to say about a Jewish Christian movement in Egypt.⁴ Hoennicke has advanced the idea that the Jewish Christian community existed on the island of Crete:

One must assume that in Crete Jewish Christianity had made itself broader, which to Paul was

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The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, 33, 2-6; 34, 5-8; 38, 3-4; 59, 2 - 61, 3.

²Dodd, op. cit., p. xxviii.

³Eusebius, op. cit., V 10.

⁴Harnack, op. cit., I, 300.

hostile. . . These people numbered themselves, it is true, in the Christian community but their conduct suited them not and their talk is vain.¹

This is the only reference to such a movement, but it is logical to suppose that within the wide-spread Jewish Diaspora some Christian Jews would have been found. However, their influence in those areas was small, if indeed they had any influence at all.

Evidence is sufficient to permit us to state that in the period of the hundred years following the death of Jesus, there was a Jewish Christian community in Palestine. While probably not numerous, it was widespread. Then because of the trend of political forces and growing nationalistic spirit, it gradually met increasing hostility by its Jewish neighbors.

Also at the same time, Jewish Christianity in this period was divided within itself. From the account of the Book of Acts we see that at Jerusalem there were those who, while adhering personally to the Law, differed in their requirements for non-Jewish believers. Some held that the Jewish Law was not binding on gentile converts, as it was on Jews. Among this group we may well put Paul, and also Peter part of the time. The attitude of the

¹
Gustav. Hoennicke, Das Judenchristentum (Berlin: Trowitzsch and Sohn, 1908), p. 157.

Jerusalem Church under James is not as clear as we might like. There is no statement that would allow us to believe that the gentile mission was entirely acceptable to the Jerusalem leaders. The requirements imposed upon the gentile converts were the same as those that Judaism made for the God-fearers or the "proselytes of the gate." It may be that to James and his associates the gentile converts were to be a corresponding class in the Christian movement. Such, however, was not the idea of Paul and his co-workers, and subsequent history has followed Paul's interpretation. In Jewish Christianity, however, the split evidently remained between what we might call the rigorous and the lax party.

It is difficult to identify these parties with the terms applied to the Jewish Christians in literature. One of the terms for the Jewish Christian movement was that of Ebionite or the poor. This term is first found used by Irenaeus, who described the Jewish Christians in his refutation of heresies.¹ Irenaeus concludes that the Jewish Christians rejected the divinity of Christ.

Wrong, also, are the Ebionites, who do not accept by faith the union of God and man, not willing to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary.²

¹ Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, I. 26. 2; III. 11. 7; III. 15. 1; III. 21. 1; IV. 33. 4; VI. 3.
² Ibid., V. 1. 3.

He condemned them also for failing to use wine in the Sacra-
ments,¹ an Essenic idea that was foreign to contemporary
Jewish practice. He goes on further to say that they used
the Gospel of Matthew,² rejected Paul and called him an
apostate from the Law,³ observed the rite of circumcision
and followed Jewish customs.⁴ It is also related of them
that they held Jerusalem in reverence. With all of this
description, it is apparent that Irenaeus is not too in-
terested in the Jewish Christians, he is not bitter against
them and apparently is describing them as a curiosity. To
him, it is apparent that they were not an important or a
dangerous movement which might threaten the Catholic Church.
Of them it has been said:

These Jewish Christians celebrate Passover on
the fourteenth of Nisan in the same manner as
the Jews, they are strict in their Sabbath ob-
servance and most particular about the laws of
ritual impurity and they perform the rite of
circumcision.⁵

The next reference to the Ebionites is to be
found in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius where he
ascribes the origin of the word Ebionites (the poor) to

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²Ibid., V. 1. 3.

³Ibid., I. 26. 2.

⁴Ibid., V. 24. 4.

⁵Ibid., I. 26. 1.

⁵A. Marmorstein, "Judaism and Christianity in the
Middle of the Third Century," Hebrew Union College Annual,
X (1935), 229.

their poor and mean opinion concerning Christ, believing him to be a poor and ordinary man, denying the Virgin Birth, and insisting on complete observance of the Law. Here Eusebius calls attention to the fact that there were also other and more lax sects of Jewish Christians.¹ He also reports of "great numbers from the circumcision, that came over to the Christian faith at that time."²

Much of Eusebius' information is from the work of Hegesippus who lived in the latter half of the second century. Hegesippus was familiar with Palestine and the Christian movement there. In at least one recorded account, Hegesippus quoted from the Gospel of the Hebrews,³ and it is apparent that he knew the Hebrew (i.e. Aramaic) language. It is interesting that in this period it would appear that Hebrew and Aramaic were so little known among Christians as to merit a record of that fact. Hegesippus was formerly thought to be the most striking example of a Jewish Christian,⁴ but this is now seriously questioned. His ability to move about in Palestine in the years immediately after the Bar Kokhba War especially in Aelia, which was prohibited to the Jews, points to the probability of gentile nationality. However, he is one invaluable

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²Eusebius, op. cit., III 26.

³Ibid., III 35.

⁴As quoted Ibid., IV 22.

⁴Hort, op. cit., pp. 164ff.

source of information of Jewish Christianity in this obscure period. While his account must be studied critically, as must all ancient historical records, his record is valuable. Eusebius also refers to Symmachus, who made a Greek translation of the Old Testament for the Jews. Eusebius quotes Origen as stating that Symmachus had been an Ebionite before he became an orthodox Jew.¹

Hippolytus in his study of heresies is the next to describe the Ebionites. He is even less concerned with them than Irenaeus, from whom apparently he derives most of his information. It is quite clear that to him they are no more than a curiosity. In his work he describes the Ebionites, but it is obviously by hearsay. He virtually repeats Irenaeus' account but adds that they were founded by a man named Ebion!² As to the doctrinal position of the Ebionites, Hippolytus states:

They live in conformity to the custom of the Jews alleging that they are justified by fulfilling the Law. . .and saying that Jesus was justified by fulfilling the Law. . . if any one else fulfilled the Commandments he would have been that Christ. They allege that when they in like manner fulfill the Law they are able to become christs for they assert that our Lord himself was a man in a like sense with all.³

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Eusebius, op. cit., IV 63.

²Hippolytus, Refutation of All the Heresies, VII 35.

³Ibid., VII 22.

To Hippolytus the Essenes, on the other hand, were strictly a Jewish sect distinguished from the Jewish Christians.¹

One of the terms which was applied to the Jewish Christians was Ebionite, and as the evidence indicates they were zealous for the Law and opposed Paul and the gentile mission. However, there were known to be other groups or sects within Jewish Christianity. Hoennicke is probably not accurate in his statement, "The Palestinians believing in Jesus were from the beginning Ebionites."²

Another term for the Jewish Christians was that of Nazarene (or Nazorene). In Palestine the Christians were called Nazarenes in New Testament times. (Acts 24:5) This term was applied even to Jesus himself not only by outsiders (Acts 6:14; John 18:5, 7, 19:19; Luke 18:37; Matt. 2:23, 26:71), but also the name was in use within the Christian Church. (Acts 2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 22:8, 26:9; Luke 24:19) The meaning of the name is open to question, but it has been studied in detail by Henry M. Shires,³ who concludes that the name was originated as a geographical appellation based upon the village of Nazareth. One of the early references to this sect may be in

¹

²Ibid., IX 13-16.

³Hoennicke, op. cit., p. 2.

H. M. Shires, "The Meaning of the Term 'Nazarene,'" Thesis, 1945.

Pliny's History, where he makes a reference to "the tetrarch of the Nazarenes,"¹ but it is not clear that he was referring to the Jewish Christian movement. The nature of this group will be discussed in greater detail as we study the references to it by later writers. However, it is probable that the terms Nazarene and Ebionite refer to two different sects or groups, and perhaps the difference was geographical.

Lohmeyer traces the theological differences as based on the difference between the Galilean and the Jerusalem churches. It is his opinion that the Galileans would have followed more along the lines of what we now know as Ebionite, while the Jerusalem group may easily have been the Nazarenes with whom the author of Luke-Acts would have been more familiar. The Galileans were loyal Jews and loyal to the Torah, with an emphasis on poverty and an apocalyptic essentially based on the celestial son of man. While Jerusalem was more cosmopolitan, wealthy, and of a more political nature, it looked for a Messiah as the anointed king of Israel.² Hirschberg is of the opinion that all Hebrew or Aramaic speaking sects of early Christianity called themselves Nazarenes, a fact which caused great confusion in Patristic literature. As

¹Pliny, History, V 8.

²Lohmeyer cited in Grant, op. cit., pp. 143f.

he says:

The Jews, however, apparently applied the name Nazarenes only to those Jewish Christians who kept within the original line of the movement, while any follower of Paul, whether of Jewish or gentile origin, was called a 'Min' which included those Nazarenes who were credited by Jerome with having adopted Pauline doctrines.¹

The exact origin of these Jewish Christian groups is unknown. As we have pointed out, there is New Testament evidence of a Palestinian mission both by Christ and his disciples. The Jerusalem Church continued in existence as a Jewish movement until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 135, exhibiting a position of some leadership in Jewish circles, but it must not be considered as a seat of rigid authority. Such authority was lacking in contemporary Judaism, and the Jewish Christians with their semi-legal status would have been free to develop as they did into rather widely different sects. There was no theologian or administrator in Jewish Christianity comparable to Paul, to interpret, explain, and when necessary to punish.

Jewish Christianity began as a synthesis of two opposing philosophies, legalism and antinomianism, and throughout its history it continued to be strongly syncretistic. Hort has listed several early themes of doctrine

¹

H. Hirschberg, "Allusions to the Apostle Paul in the Talmud," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXII Part II (1943), 83.

that attempt to combine Jewish and Christian elements, the Samaritan followers of Simon Magus, the followers of Dositheus,¹ Deleobius, and Menander. Little is known of any of these men or the doctrines of the movements that they started.

However, one figure looms up in this period as typical of this trend, that is Cerinthus. According to Polycarp,² Cerinthus was a contemporary of St. John in Asia. Epiphanius further states that Cerinthus was the leader³ of the Judaizing opponents of Paul. This is improbable, and the name of this man and his movement were apparently unknown to other and more reliable Fathers. Justin, Hegesippus, Clement and Tertullian fail to mention him. Hort is inclined to accept a statement of Polycarp that Cerinthus lived and worked in Asia at about the time the Fourth Gospel was being written.⁴ All that we know of Cerinthus⁵ is preserved in the works of Irenaeus and Hippolytus, on which other references seem to be based. This material has⁶ been analyzed by Lipsius. The doctrine of Cerinthus was apparently a union of Jewish Christianity with gnostic thought. Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, taught the

¹

Hort, op. cit., p. 188.

²Cited in Eusebius, op. cit., III 28; IV 14.

³Epiphanius, Panarion, XXVIII 4.

⁴Hort, op. cit., p. 188.

⁵Irenaeus, op. cit., I. 26. 1; III. 11. 1.

⁶R. A. Lipsius, Zur Quellenkritik des Epiphanius, as quoted in Hort, op. cit., p. 189.

observance of circumcision and the Sabbath. Cerinthus rejected Paul, Acts, and all the Gospels except Matthew, and this he edited. He added the gnostic belief that the world was created by angels, one of which was the god of the Jews who gave the Jews their law, which was not wholly good.¹ The movement was strongly chiliastic. This movement was of little importance and apparently did not long survive either in Jewish or catholic Christianity. It was a forerunner, however, of the gnostic movement, which was such a difficulty in the development of the church. Hippolytus, in describing the movement of Cerinthus, appears to be dealing in tradition and history.

Another more important syncretistic Jewish Christian movement was that of the Elxaites. Traditionally in the third year of Trajan, A.D. 101, a prophet called Alexis arose in the east Jordan who was afterward known by his Syrian name, Elxai.² Hort discounts this as he feels that there is no evidence that this prophet, if he lived, may be dated this early.³ The movement of Elxai was a sizable and an important one. It is reported that he wrote his prophecy in a book that was circulated and preserved by his churches. Fragments of his works are preserved in

¹

Hort, op. cit., p. 189.

²Epiphanius, op. cit., XIX 2, 10.

³Hort, op. cit., p. 199.

¹
 Hippolytus and in the works of Epiphanius. This group evidently opposed the sacrificial system of Judaism, and set high values on the washings or baptisms, which the prophet recommends as therapeutic for illness and demon possession. According to Elxai, Christ is the Son of the great and highest God and is called the great King. Christ is a pre-existent Being of divine power, who already in previous ages has been incarnated into various persons, for example in the person of Adam. For Elxai, Christianity was the divine religion and his sacred book was for baptized Christians. But he knew more than the church, as he preaches a second baptism that affords forgiveness of sins a second time. Lietzmann, who has studied this movement in some detail,² points out that it was not an ascetic movement.

³
 It required early marriage. As Lietzmann says:

It is not easy to get a clear picture of the essential nature of this prophet from the disconnected notices of his opponents. The Jewish elements of his preaching are clearly recognizable and they contain rank imagery with which both the apocalyptic and the specifically Christian ideas are decked out. Baptismal ceremonies and opposition to animal sacrifices and false prophecy unite him with the sects east of Jordan. . . the cradle of a Judaistic gnosis.⁴

This book of the prophet Elxai came into the hands of

¹
 Hippolytus, op. cit., IX 13-17.

²Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 247ff.

³Epiphanius, op. cit., XIX 17.

⁴Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 249f.

Hippolytus at Rome. It would have been unknown to us had not a certain Alcibiades brought it from Syria to Rome about A.D. 200, when he came forward as a missionary of this prophet but without much success. Hippolytus examined the writings of the prophet and wrote a detailed account of it in his work on heresies.¹ It was a vigorous movement and was of considerable importance.

Hort terms this movement of Elxai as an Essene-Ebionite movement, and links it with the pseudo-Clementine literature which we shall discuss below.² The movements of Cerinthus and Elxai indicate this tendency to syncretism that may be the basic origin of that strange movement known as the Mandaeans, which exists in the Mesopotamian region today.

The Jewish Christians attempted to create a synthesis of certain aspects of Judaism with a Messianic belief centered in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. All evidence points to the fact that their theology and especially their christology differed markedly from that of the developing Catholic Church. In our study of the references to this movement by the patristic writers of this period, we find that in general the Fathers express disapproval of the doctrines of the Ebionites and the

¹Hippolytus, op. cit., IX 13 l.
²Hort, op. cit., pp. 199f.

Nazarenes. However, they did not feel greatly concerned about the movements, and looked upon them more in the nature of curiosities.

One of the earliest post-Apostolic authors was Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who suffered martyrdom between A.D. 108 to 110. He had lived in Syria, the area where we might most likely expect him to be familiar with such a movement. Yet, in his preserved letters there is no clear-cut direct reference to Jewish Christianity as such. This is an argument from silence, and one must remember that in his letters he was writing to specific churches of Asia and dealing with definite problems familiar to those churches. There is no reason to suppose that he would mention a subject foreign to his thesis, and absence of his concern over the Jewish Christian heretical thought must not be taken as too conclusive. However, there are a few references in his letters to Jewish practices that he condemns: in Magnesians, "For if we are living until now according to Judaism we confess that we have not received grace"¹; again, "It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity"²; and in the Epistle to the Philadelphians,

¹ Ignatius, The Epistle to the Magnesians, VIII 1.
² Ibid., X 3.

But if anyone interpret Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from the circumcised than Judaism from the uncircumcised.¹

There is a possibility that he is here referring to proselyting activities by Jewish Christians of Asia, but it is inconclusive and is equally open to other interpretations, such as the missionary minded Judaism of the period before the Bar Kokhba rebellion.

One of the most interesting references to the subject of the relationship of the Catholic Church to Jewish Christianity is to be found in the work of Justin, who c. A.D. 150 wrote the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. If this is not the record of an actual event it does bear indications of being a synthesis of his experiences in his reported conversations with a Jewish scholar, Trypho. As they discuss Christ, the Jew admits that he has studied the Christian Gospels. It was within the limits of possibility in this period for the Jews to study these "heretical" books. Later in the passage, Justin further discusses the question as to whether Jewish Christians, who observed the Law, could be saved.² Obviously, he knew of such churches and was inclined to let them count as Christian, if they did not also require the same observance of

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Ignatius, The Epistle to the Philadelphians, VI 1.

²Justin, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 47, 1-3.

the Law from others. He was aware though that many people would not recognize them as Christians even under those conditions. Justin is one of our most reliable authors of this period, and he knew the eastern world quite well. He was born in Palestine, and lived in proconsular Asia for some time before moving to Rome.

In the third and fourth centuries we hear almost nothing of the Jewish Christians.¹ Origen is about the only author to deal seriously with them, and his references are most valuable.² In his work he also refers to some Jewish Christians, who differed from the Ebionites in that they accepted the Virgin Birth.³ He further refers to this difference in christology in his work Against Celsus.

Some who accept Jesus. . . and yet would regulate their lives. . . in accordance with the Jewish law, - and these are the twofold sect of Ebionites, who either acknowledge with us that Jesus was born of a virgin, or deny this.⁴

In further refuting the attacks of Celsus he states:

. . . and (Celsus) does not appear to know that there are Israelites who are converts to Christianity, and who have not abandoned the law of their fathers.⁵

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Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

²Origen, *De Principiis*, IV 22.

³Origen, Homily on Jeremiah, 19 12, cited from Lietzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁴Origen, *Against Celsus*, V 61.

⁵*Ibid.*, II 3.

Here Origen infers that Celsus' ignorance of this obvious and well-known fact casts doubts on the reliability of his other work. At a later time he says:

. . . there are certain heretical sects which do not receive the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, as the two sects of Ebionites.¹

Probably his most important statement in this matter can be found in this discussion:

. . . the Jewish converts have not deserted the law of their fathers, inasmuch as they live according to its prescription, receiving their very name from the poverty of the law, according to the literal acceptation of the word; for Ebion signifies 'poor' among the Jews, and those Jews who have received Jesus as Christ are called by the name Ebionites.²

Origen point out Celsus' error in assuming that a Jew when converted must abandon Judaism. Origen assumes that normally such a Jew would remain within Judaism as an Ebionite.

The attitude as seen in Origen, Justin, and Irenaeus is the usual attitude of Christian writers of this period. The Jewish Christians were recognized as existing on the fringe of the Christian Church. They were not yet totally excluded, but were regarded as at least unorthodox, and it was beginning to be a question of whether they could even be entitled to the name of Christian. At best the

¹
²Ibid., V 65.
Ibid., II 1.

movement was one of curiosity rather than one of competition. There were no pressing threats to the Catholic Church. The Jewish Christians, by their adherence to the Law and their unorthodox Christology as well as geographical isolation, were beyond the serious concern of the gentile Christian Church.

Within their own race though, their lot was not any better. There is no reason to believe that the Palestinian Jews and even the Pharisees were opposed to the movement, as it existed prior to the first Jewish War 66-70. Judaism was still free enough to admit another, if somewhat strange, Messianic sect. Nor was the missionary spirit at this time foreign to Judaism. From the time of Hillel there had been a growing interest in the world mission of Judaism in the best of prophetic spirit. The missionary spirit of Judaism is to be seen reflected in the works of Philo¹ and Josephus.² It cannot be denied that the Jewish nation as a whole attained very considerable success during this period.³

This missionary movement of Judaism was brought to a sudden close in the disaster of A.D. 135. Following

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Philo, Life of Moses, 2 20; 4 204.

²Josephus, Against Apion, 2 280-282.

³E. Schurer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), III, 164f.; Augustine, City of God, VI 11.

this, the Roman Empire altered its attitude toward the Jews, dealing severely with Jewish attempts to proselyte. They retaliated by resisting as they had before under the threat of Antiochus Epiphanes. Thereafter, the Jews devoted themselves to purifying and developing their religious and social life on Pharisaic principles. This ultimately evolved into the rabbinic form of Judaism, which today is known as Normative Judaism.

In this development, Christianity even of Jewish form was excluded. Moore is of the opinion that the Nazarenes at the beginning of the second century were making wide headway, and that this explains the bitter reaction by the rabbis.¹ Marmorstein has analyzed the references to the Jewish Christians in Christian literature, and has concluded that the frequent references to the Jewish transgressors refer to the Jewish Christians. He writes that the Jewish Christians:

. . . lived and thought as Jews and were attacked by their fellow Christians as Jews, and by Jews as apostates.²

In his analysis of all the available Jewish literature in this period, he notes that there were Jews who were friendly, as well as some who were hostile, toward these

¹ G. F. Moore, History of Religions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), II, 146.

² Marmorstein, op. cit., p. 223.

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transgressors or Jewish Christians.

It is difficult to determine the attitude of the non-Christian Jews toward gentile Christians. Shires is of the opinion that Jerome and Tertullian both witness to the fact that the Jews reviled all Christians under the name of Nazarene.² Moore, on the other hand, is of the opinion that gentile Christianity in the eyes of the Jews, whatever it may have owed to Judaism in its origin, was in its nature a wholly different religion - it was not an heretical Judaism. The development of gentile Christianity increased the prejudice against the Nazarenes at home, although they were as adverse as the rabbis themselves to the antinomian trend of the gentile church. Christianity made many converts among the Greek speaking Jews in the gentile synagogues, but had no effect upon Judaism.³ This is probably closer to the case, for Judaism and Christianity had not yet come into conflict. The Christian movement was itself by this time an illicit religion not powerful enough to attack the Jews.

There is evidence of a growing hostility, however, in the attitude of the Fourth Gospel, and in the story of

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Ibid., pp. 223ff.

²Shires, *op. cit.*, p. 23; also A. Harnack, Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), I, 401.

³G. F. Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), I, 92.

the martyrdom of Polycarp in which the Jews are accused of demanding the death of the aged Bishop of Smyrna. Also, the Gospels were condemned at Jamnia.¹ If Biblical criticism is accurate in assuming that the Gospels were gentile Christian documents, they were at this time at least recognized as a threat to Judaism - if it is the canonical Gospels that were condemned. Records of that Council are fragmentary and it is probable that it was a Jewish work such as the Gospel of the Hebrews which was condemned. At least we know that by this date the rabbis were hostile to the Christian movement. Shortly thereafter, they apparently surrendered the LXX to gentile Christians and set about to prepare a new Greek translation of the Scripture.

One interesting development of this period was the early and apparently unopposed abandoning of the Sabbath by the Christian Church. This is seen in the Gospels, and verified by Pliny in his Letter. The usual explanation is the growth of the "first day" as the Christian day of worship in memory of the Resurrection. According to Scott, it would occur as the natural use of the synagogue² after Sabbath afternoon services. He further points out that it was natural in the Greek world to worship on the

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¹Ibid., I, 87.

²Scott, op. cit., p. 73.

first day of the week.¹ There is, however, another and probably better reason and that was by the hostility of the Jews to profanation of the Sabbath, "a pagan who rests on the Sabbath is deserving of death."²

A further evidence of the split between the Jew and Christian is to be found in the Twelfth Benediction which reads:

For the excommunicate let there be no hope and the arrogant government do thou swiftly uproot in our day; and may the Christians and the heretics suddenly be laid low and not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.

This Birkath ha Minim was apparently composed by Rabbi Samuel the Small at Jamnia in the time of Gamaliel the Second, about A.D. 85, and is referred to by both Epiphanius and Jerome as indicative of Jewish opposition to Christianity.³ The purpose of this Benediction was to exclude Jewish Christians from the synagogue. Schurer thinks the Twelfth Benediction was against all Christians in general.⁴ It is difficult to imagine gentile Christians of this period in Palestine desiring to enter the synagogue to worship even if they dared, nor would we expect the Jews to

¹ Ibid.

² Rabbi Simon ben Lakish in B. Sanh. 58b as cited in Marmorstein, op. cit., p. 261.

³ Epiphanius, op. cit., XXIX 9; Jerome, On Isaiah, V 18, XLIX 7, LII 4.

⁴ Schurer, op. cit., II, Part 2, 88.

take this form of opposing them. It is evident, however, that Jewish Christians who still looked upon themselves as Jews in all respects would have frequented synagogues, and such a curse, required to be recited orally by all worshippers, would exclude these Jewish Christians. It is more likely, therefore, that the adoption of the Benediction is another piece of evidence leading to the conclusion that at an early date the Jewish Christian movement was looked upon with hostility by the rabbis.

After this the Jewish Christian movement proceeded on its own way, disowned and rejected both by the orthodox Jews and the gentile Christians, and subject to official persecution by the Roman government for its allegiance to both.

CHAPTER IV

THE LITERATURE OF THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

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We now know that the first and second centuries of the Christian era composed a literary age, perhaps more so than during any period since that time until the very recent centuries. The papyrus finds of Egypt have opened to us a wealth of literature of that period. In the literary life, we know that books were relatively common and easily obtainable. Histories, dramas, poems, satires, and other forms of literary activity were common. Travel records and philosophical and homiletical works, such as the diatribes, were well-known. In addition, we now know that there was a great deal of non-literary correspondence particularly in the field of letter writing. It was a letter writing age and Christianity has profited greatly by its early adoption of that form of exchange of thought. While the majority of literary finds of that period are in the Greek, we do know that other languages were in use for these purposes.

Especially important is our knowledge of the Jewish literary activity. The work of Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,¹ indicates that

¹
R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2 vols.

Judaism did not have the antipathy toward literature in post-Biblical times, the period following Ezra, that has been frequently ascribed to it. We are learning, too, that the Hellenistic influences on Palestine were greater than was supposed some time ago. Schurer traces evidence of the Greek influence in Palestine on thought, language, and customs during this period.¹ Bentwich has also traced the influence of Hellenistic life on Palestinian Judaism.² As we shall see below, the literature of Palestine took certain trends, but we must not fall into the error of thinking that in this age the Jews were not a writing people. The Jewish literary activity of the Diaspora is well-known, especially the literature of Alexandria as exemplified in the works of Philo. But Palestine itself was also the seat of literary activity. Following the restoration under Ezra there developed an imposing mass of apocryphal literature, and many of these works are retained in our semi-canonical Apocrypha. Other writings have been preserved in more or less pure form, while many works of this period are now known to us only by name.

It is interesting to note that apocryphal Jewish literature apparently ceased after the destruction of the

¹ Schurer, op. cit., I, Division II, 1-51.

² N. Bentwich, Hellenism (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1920).

Temple in A.D. 70. This date is given as the terminus ad quem of most of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works. This would indicate that the Judaism of the early Christian period was not adverse to writing, and that the early Christians, who were Jews, were not undertaking a revolutionary step in setting down their traditions in written form. The pseudepigraphic or anonymous nature of most of the non-Pauline works of the New Testament would be in harmony with this trend. We need mention only in passing the theory advanced by C. C. Torrey that much of the non-Pauline corpus of the New Testament was written in Aramaic and later translated into Greek.¹ This view is not looked upon with favor by the vast majority of New Testament critics, but most students will acknowledge that the New Testament owes a great debt to the Jewish Christians of the Apostolic period for the origin and the inspiration of much of the New Testament writing.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss critically the canonical works of the New Testament as possible documents of a specifically Jewish Christian movement other than to say that the evidence is against such a conclusion, with the possible exception of the Epistle of James and perhaps the Gospel according

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Torrey, op. cit.,

to Matthew. It is, however, important to remember that in the embryonic period of Christianity, that is before the Pauline emphasis became dominant, the Jewish culture which nurtured Christianity was a relatively literary culture. The aversion to writing, that characterized the later age of the Tannaim from A.D. 70 to 200, marked the period of ascendance of the Pharisaic movement which has generally been regarded as anti-Christian in its emphasis. This non-literary period, which terminated with the writing of the Mishnah of Judah haNassi about A.D. 200, was that time in which Jewish Christianity was developing its characteristic dogma and form, and in which in all probability it was at the peak of its influence. It is necessary for us to see if we can discover in or following this period any literary remains of the Jewish Christian community. Harnack answers this question with a clear negative:

No Jewish Christian writings have been transmitted to us, even from the earliest period. . . . our only sources of knowledge of Jewish Christianity in the post-Pauline period are merely the accounts of the Church Fathers.¹

This view is not shared by some students, and it is necessary for us to review briefly the works that have been ascribed to the Jewish Christian movement.

¹
A. Harnack, History of Dogma (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1902), I, 295f. note 2.

The canonical New Testament is beyond the scope of this study. There are in the canon no books that are generally agreed upon as distinctive works of the Jewish Christian movement following its separation from the developing Catholic Church. Many have seen the Letter of James as a Jewish Christian writing,¹ but this is held by others to be only a possibility, and it is denied by many. If it is such a work, it is in no sense indicative of any distinctively characteristic traits of Jewish Christianity, and its linguistic purity, as one of the better examples of Greek in the canon, would argue against such a conclusion. We cannot, therefore, consider the New Testament as a product of the Jewish Christian movement.

One of the most important works for our study is the lost Gospel according to the Hebrews, fragments of which are quoted by Epiphanius, Eusebius, and Jerome. To the latter, we are indebted for the fullest remaining records of this volume.² Many different attitudes have been taken concerning this book. It is now generally agreed, that it is not the Hebrew original of the canonical Gospel according to Matthew as Jerome originally thought. Indeed,

¹ J. H. Ropes, St. James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

² Jerome's references to this work are summarized in M. R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 3ff.

Jerome later abandoned this position himself. Dibelius is of the opinion that it is the work of Greek speaking Jewish Christians, composed in the second century and used by the Nazarenes.¹ James also seems to be of the opinion that it is a Hebrew translation from the Greek Matthew, altered to agree with the Jewish Christian doctrine. The work of Parker, in reconstructing this book, has restored much of it.² However, the gaps in the restored text make it difficult to deduce much concerning the life, work, or doctrine of the Jewish Christians of Palestine. Parker has come to the conclusion that in all probability this document was an Aramaic book of a very early date, at least in the second generation of Jewish Christians, and that it was in use by Jewish Christians at least until the time of Jerome. By a careful comparison of this document with our canonical Scriptures, he has come to the conclusion that its supposed relationship to Matthew is superficial, although it led Jerome and Epiphanius to consider it the original Hebrew form of that Gospel.³ A closer study, however, would seem to indicate that this document bears

¹ M. Dibelius, A Fresh Approach to the Literature of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 82.

² Pierson Parker, "A Partial Reconstruction of the Gospel According to the Hebrews," Thesis, 1934.

³ Ibid.

closest resemblance to the distinctive Lukan sources of the Gospel of Luke.¹ While these conclusions are of interest in helping us trace the development of the canon, the portions of the Gospel According to the Hebrews which remain to us do not help in our study of the Jewish Christian Church and its distinctive doctrine or practice. From the reasoning of Parker it would seem that this Gospel, at least in the form in which Jerome and Epiphanius found it, would have had the characteristic and distinctively orthodox passages of Matthew relating to the genealogy and the Birth stories, for both of them, avid hunters of heresy, would have noted such an omission. Yet it is the miraculous Birth that appears to have primarily separated some Jewish Christians from their more orthodox brothers.

The references to this work in the obscure passages of Epiphanius, and also his references to the Gospel According to the Ebionites² (identified by many with the Gospel According to the Hebrews), indicate that the Jewish Christians did possess the story of Jesus in a form at least closely approximating the distinctively Christian literary form of the Gospels, and so at least in this respect in the

¹ Pierson Parker, "Ancient Citations of the Gospel According to the Hebrews," Thesis, 1933, I.

² Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 14.

general tradition of the Christian Church. This is further substantiated by the interesting Talmudic passage, "The gilyonim (evangelion?) and the writings of the minim¹ do not defile the hands." On this passage, Torrey bases much of his claim that the Jewish Christians were the authors of the non-Pauline portions of the New Testament and especially the Gospels. The errors of this theory are patent. However, this rabbinic decision does indicate that there was Christian literature known to the Jews, which was not regarded as sacred, that is, "does not defile the hands." In context, it would seem that the decision concerning sacredness was due not so much to heretical content as to its contemporary date of writing, for Ben Sirah was also placed in this category in this passage. It does, however, substantiate the theory that the Jewish Christians did possess some literary works even at an early date. The origin of this Talmudic reference has generally been dated about A.D. 80.

There has been considerable effort made to detect Christian additions to the Jewish Apocryphal works, and there is ample evidence that many of these works have been altered, edited, and enlarged to give them distinctive Christian bias. Among Jewish works so edited may be

¹ Tosephta Yadaim, II, 13.

listed: The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Sibylline Oracles, IV Esdras, The Secrets of Enoch, The Ascension of Isaiah, The Apocalypses of Adam, Elijah, and Zephaniah. All of these show evidence that there was Christian interpolation at an early date. Charles has collected most of these interpolations as they have been preserved.¹ However, a study of these editorial additions indicates that there is no evidence that any of them were by Jewish Christian hands, but on the contrary everything points to the developing Greek Church as the origin. For the most part, they are to establish or to reinforce the doctrinal position distinctively of the Catholic Church, and in general are alien to the doctrine and spirit of Jewish Christianity, as we are able to reconstruct it.

There are other possible literary remains of the Jewish Christian Church. The discovery of the Didache, in 1873, was greeted with joy as the unearthing of a manual of the Jewish Christian community of the late first century. Further study has led to a modification and in some cases a reversal of this original conclusion. Kohler² and other Jewish writers tend to see the Didache as a Jewish manual, that has suffered corruption at the hands of later Christian

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²Charles, op. cit.

Kohler, op. cit., pp. 247ff.

writers. On the other hand, Lietzmann is of the opinion that it is a Christian work that reflects a Christianity entirely free from the Law.¹ Moore has made a careful study of the Didache, and it is his opinion that:

The Christian part of the Didache shows the hand of an author familiar with Jewish customs and forms. . . The content is Christian; but they (prayers) are throughout reminiscent of the Jewish forms of prayer.²

Goodspeed is generally in agreement with this conclusion, and it is his belief that the Didache:

. . . was not. . . a Jewish document. . . turned to Christian uses; it was a Jewish Christian tract. . . It is at once apparent that the Teaching (the Didache) reduces religion to conformity to a series of legalistic precepts.³

While the Didache shows a Jewish order of prayer, a eucharist that closely follows Jewish practice (for example the cup is administered first and then the bread as it would be in a Jewish kiddush meal), and an emphasis on legalistic precepts as a guide to conduct, it does not show the characteristics that one would expect in a Jewish document written for Christian use. For one thing, while Hebraisms are to be found in it, they are similar to those in the Gospels. The entire literary style and vocabulary

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Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 273.

²Moore, op. cit., I, 189.

³E. J. Goodspeed, A History of Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 159.

show a strong affinity with the New Testament. While there are many passages from the New Testament contained in it, at least eighteen from Matthew and probably some from Luke,¹ there are only two quotations traceable to the Old Testament.² It is probable that Schaff is correct in his opinion that the author was certainly a Jewish Christian in the tradition of Matthew and James.³ In any event, it is of significance that if it is a Jewish Christian manual it does not reflect a phase or a movement far from the developing course of orthodox Christianity. Although certain mystical and sacramental aspects of Pauline Christianity are lacking in this, it is in close affinity to the Epistle of James and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Also, it was not regarded as heretical by the Fathers who referred to it. If it is a Jewish Christian work it is not representative of the characteristic Jewish Christian movement, but rather reflects a stage in which Christianity was evolving into catholic orthodoxy.

The Didache has been considered as the nucleus of the later Apostolic Constitutions and the Didascalia.

¹ Didache I 3-5 from Luke 6:27-30. Didache XVI 1 from Luke 12:35.

² Didache XVI 3 from Malachi 1:11-14. Didache XVI 7 from Zecharia 5:14-15.

³ P. Schaff, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), p. 125.

Kohler has advanced the theory that the Didascalia was another example of Christian alteration of a Jewish Essene manual.¹ There are Jewish elements in this work, especially in the order and form of prayers in Book Seven, which show close parallels to the Eighteen Benedictions. This is not greatly significant for much of all orthodox Christianity shows thought forms close to that of its Jewish heritage. However, the tone of this work definitely rules against its being a Jewish Christian document. On the contrary, it seems to be written as an attack by the Catholic Church against those Jews:

. . .who believe in Christ but could not sever their Jewish connections. The Didascalia was written with a specific purpose of frightening away the Jewish Christians from their Jewish practices and usages.²

Marmorstein points out this acknowledged debt of the author to Judaism, and observes that it is not impossible that the writer of the Didascalia was born a Jew.³ This writing is an attack on the Jewish Christian movement and is seen to be in the direct tradition of Paul, who was opposed by Jewish Christians. There is no indication that this book may be considered as an example of the writing of Jewish Christianity.

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Kohler, op. cit., p. 240.

²Marmorstein, op. cit., pp. 230ff.

³Ibid.

The pseudo-Clementine writings, the Homilies and Recognitions, have been declared by many to be the work of the Jewish Christian community. In the form remaining to us, they are quite late. Goodspeed dates the work as about A.D. 313 to 325.¹ However, it is obvious that they are based upon earlier sources, one of which is the Ascent (Steps) of James regarded by Epiphanius to be an Ebionite writing.² Hort considers the Clementines as a contraction of a voluminous third century work entitled Peri loi Petrou, of which there is no other trace extant. It is now generally agreed that the pseudo-Clementine literature is late. Hort affirms that it cannot be connected with the Christianity of the Apostolic Age.³ On the other hand, Marmorstein considers it to be a valuable work of the Jewish Christian community:

. . . the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions reveal Posh'e Israel in their true character. It is the mutual property of Judaism and Christianity.⁴

For example, Harnack says:

The Pseudo-Clementines may, to some extent, be used, though with caution, in determining the doctrines of syncretistic Jewish Christianity.⁵

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Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 127.

²Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 16.

³Hort, op. cit., p. 201.

⁴Marmorstein, op. cit., p. 229.

⁵Harnack, op. cit., I, 316.

The evaluation of Lietzmann is probably too radical when he writes:

. . . only quite recently have penetrating researches recognized the Clementine writings as a freely composed romance without any significance for research in the early Christian and Judaistic period.¹

Even so, it presents no clear insight into the Jewish Christian movement. Rather, it seems to be, as Goodspeed says, the work of a catholic author who combined his sources without any awareness of heretical tendencies.²

Apart from these possible documentary sources of information concerning the Jewish Christian movement, there appear to be few if any allusions to possible documents. One reference might be the lost memoirs of Hegesippus, an eastern Christian whom some think to have been from a Jewish Christian community. This work is quoted in fragmentary form in Eusebius.³ Goodspeed has referred to a lost Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus which was cited by Celsus and Origen.⁴ According to the reference in Celsus, Jason was a Jewish Christian who converted Papiscus, a Jew, to his belief, but nothing more is known of this book.

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Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 251.

²Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 127.

³Eusebius, op. cit., II 23; III 11ff.; passim.

⁴Goodspeed, op. cit., p. 139.

In conclusion, the evidence indicates that we lack any literature that we may ascribe with assurance to the Jewish Christian Church apart from the Gospel According to the Hebrews, a Gospel of the Ebionites, and possibly the Didache. We have seen that there are reasons to believe that the Jewish Christian community did have some literary works that are now lost. Reasons for this lack of literary remains are not difficult to find. Our documentary sources for Christianity of the second and third centuries are predominantly of the western church and western authors showed little or no familiarity with Hebrew or Aramaic. Foakes-Jackson states that from the Apostolic Age until the time of Origen no gentile Christian seems to have known Hebrew.¹ Moffatt writes:

Eusebius recognizes a providential circumstance in the composition of the LXX. Had it not been for this version, he observes, 'we should not have got from the Jews those oracles, which they would have hidden away from us in jealousy.'²

In the eastern area of Syria and the Trans-Jordan, climatic conditions do not favor the preservation of documentary remains. Also, the hostile neighbors of the Jewish Christians (first the Jews and Romans, later the Christians

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Foakes-Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

²Praep. Evang. 349c of Eusebius as cited in J. Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 22.

who regarded their doctrines as heretical, and still later the Islamic oppressors) have apparently destroyed any primary source of Jewish Christianity that may have been composed. Our knowledge of this movement must be from secondary sources, essentially the patristic writings. We have traced the references to this movement through the early years of the church. The tone there seems to be generally one of curiosity and of half-amused contempt, but the Jewish Christians are early recognized as heretical. In the fourth century, there are some evidences that the Jewish Christian movement was continuing in existence. References to this may be seen in the writings of Epiphanius and Jerome.

CHAPTER V

JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AS DESCRIBED IN THE WORKS OF EPIPHANIUS

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JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AS DESCRIBED IN THE WORKS OF EPIPHANIUS

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It would be impossible to study the history of Jewish Christianity without making a relatively detailed record of the descriptions of it given by Epiphanius, who was Bishop of Constantia (Salamis) in Cyprus. He wrote one of the most detailed accounts of the extent and doctrine of Jewish Christianity, which remains for us to study. In his writing he has collected the records of most of the previous historians, and his work has been the basis for most subsequent studies of the subject.

Before we begin to discuss the written records of Epiphanius, it will be necessary to pause briefly to review his life. We must examine references to his works both by his near contemporaries and by subsequent students to determine what credence we can place on his writings. Like all other authors whom we study, he must be critically examined to determine, if possible, his reliability and objectivity before we can draw any conclusions from his work. Epiphanius is mentioned by three authors contemporary to him. His life and works are referred to in passages in The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates, The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, and in a few places in the extant writings

of Jerome. These references have given us some knowledge of the life and character of Epiphanius. In addition, there has grown up a large amount of legendary material about him of a later date and of virtually no reliability. He has been a popular saint and whatever we may state concerning his scholarly attainments, he has been revered even from his own lifetime as a pillar of orthodox piety. Sozomen relates briefly the traditions concerning the piety and the generosity of Epiphanius, and some of the miraculous happenings which even then were associated with his life.¹ However, generosity and miraculous abilities may not be valid criteria for academic excellence.

According to the record, Epiphanius was born about the year 315 in a small village in Palestine.² Sozomen mentions his birth place as the village of Besauduc, and that he was born during the governorship of Eleutheropolis. It is generally agreed that Epiphanius was of Jewish parentage, that he was reared as a Jew, and probably received a good education. Schaff remarks that Epiphanius, as a Jew who embraced Christianity at the age of sixteen, is the only example of a Jewish convert among the ancient Fathers, and the first example after St. Paul of a learned Jewish convert.³

¹ Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VII 27.

² *Ibid.*, VI 32.

³ Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 926.

Traces of a rather good training in Jewish lore are seen in Epiphanius' work on weights and measures. If this is the case that he was a convert from Judaism, it does much to help us understand his psychological bias against heresies, for it has been generally found that converts prove not infrequently to be the most zealous defenders of orthodoxy.

After his conversion which is probably accurately given as at the age of sixteen, he withdrew into Egypt. According to Sozomen, he was instructed by the most celebrated ascetics of Egypt with whom he resided for many years. He was celebrated in Egypt¹ and Palestine for his attainment in monastic philosophy. Epiphanius avidly embraced the monastic life. Later upon his return to Palestine, he became connected with and later the leader of a monastic community near his birthplace. He was later elected Bishop of Constantia (Salamis), and became by virtue of this election the Metropolitan of the island of Cyprus, which in his day was reputedly an important Christian center with at least twenty dioceses. He assumed his office as Bishop about the year 367, and held that post until his death probably in the year 402.

It was during this period in the episcopal office

¹ Sozomen, op. cit., VI 32.

that he wrote the works which have remained to us. Among his surviving writings is a treatise on weights and measures, Mens et Ponds, that describes the use of weights and measures of the Old Testament. This has proved a truly valuable work and one of the few of his writings that has been translated into English. In addition to this, there is the book on Jewels which is an allegorical interpretation of the significance of the gems in the breastplate of the high priest. Another of his works is the Anchoritis, or Anchor, a devotional and doctrinal discussion of orthodoxy. In addition to these, there are a few letters remaining to us that have been published in Migne's Patrologia¹giae.

His chief work and the one with which we are concerned in this study is the Panarion, or Medicine Chest, in which he attempts to catalogue, describe, and provide remedies for all of the heresies. In this work he describes eighty heresies, twenty of which by accurate definition could not be counted as heresies as they antedate the Christian Revelation. Among this twenty we will be interested in his analysis of the seven Jewish sects, which are there described. Also, in the Panarion he refers to the Jewish Christians at some length, and we will describe his

¹ Migne, Patrologiae, Volume 43, 1858.

conclusions below. This work, which has been called by Schaff "the chief hereseological work of the ancient church,"¹ has been assessed variously.

Even by his contemporaries, Epiphanius was not highly regarded for his scholarship or clear thinking.

Socrates states that:

Epiphanius being a person more eminent for his extraordinary piety than intelligence was easily influenced by the crafty representations of Theophilus.²

Sozomen also greatly discredits the intellectual facilities of Epiphanius.³ Jerome, though he speaks of Epiphanius as five-tongued referring to his linguistic abilities, elsewhere cautions us against placing too much reliability upon his works.

Recent students have tended to overemphasize Epiphanius' bias and unreliability. In describing his records of Jewish Christianity, Hort states, "Epiphanius always a confused writer here surpasses himself."⁴ And for another example, Enslin writes of Epiphanius that his claim to sanctity does not rest either on his accuracy or truthfulness.⁵ Streeter in The Primitive Church mentions that he

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Schaff, op. cit., p. 929.

²Socrates, The Ecclesiastical History, VI 10.

³Sozomen, op. cit., VIII 14, 15.

⁴Hort, op. cit., p. 189.

⁵M. S. Enslin, Christian Beginnings (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 83.

was honest and erudite yet narrow-minded and untrustworthy; his prejudice, temper, and irresponsibility limit his value.¹ Unfortunately with such references, his works have almost entirely been ignored. However, perhaps the most reasoned and valuable estimate of his work has been made by Schaff.

He (Epiphanius) was a man of earnest, monastic piety, and of sincere but illiberal zeal for orthodoxy. His good nature easily allowed him to be used as an instrument for the passions of others, and his zeal was not according to knowledge. He is the patriarch of heresy-hunters. . . . lacking in knowledge of the world and of men, in sound judgment, and in critical discernment. He was possessed of a boundless credulity. . . . causing innumerable errors and contradictions in his writings. His style is entirely destitute of beauty or elegance.²

Therefore, one might well eliminate as completely unreliable any of the references which Epiphanius would make relevant to our subject. However, such cannot be the case. His discussion of Jewish Christianity must be critically examined. For one thing we know from his life that he had the opportunity to become acquainted with the facts. Having lived in Palestine, Egypt, possibly in the East Jordan, and later in Cyprus, he would have been able to learn of any such movement, and in his orthodox zeal would not have hesitated to condemn it. It is not likely that Lipsius³

¹ B. H. Streeter, The Primitive Church (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 86.
²Schaff, op. cit., pp. 927f.
³Lipsius, op. cit.

as cited in Hoennicke¹ is correct in stating that Epiphanius was a Jewish Christian or at least possessed markedly Jewish Christian leanings. From Epiphanius' own works though, we are reasonably safe in assuming that he had knowledge of the Jewish Christian movement. At least, it would seem that he was familiar at first hand with an Ebionite group and its literature and customs in Cyprus, his own diocese, at the time of his writing.² It would appear that he had read and was familiar with the Gospel in use among these Ebionites. He also refers to their vegetarian tendencies and beliefs, that we will describe in more detail later. Lietzmann is also of the opinion that Epiphanius was familiar with the book of the prophet Elxai itself, and from Epiphanius' works it would appear that he knew of descendants of the prophet who were still alive and honored like saints.³

In addition to a firsthand knowledge of the Jewish Christian movement, it is clear that Epiphanius with great zeal and diligence pondered over and extracted much of the writings of his predecessors, and thus preserved for us fragments of some otherwise unknown works. We would particularly like to know more about the lost work on

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Hoennicke, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

²Epiphanius, *op. cit.*, XXX 18, 1.

³*Ibid.*, XIX 2, 12; LIII 1, 5.

heresies by Hippolytus, whose sole remaining record is in the Panarion. Without the works of Epiphanius, our knowledge of the development of Christianity would be much poorer. With all its limitations, his work remains a valuable source for the heresies of the first four centuries and an understanding of the orthodox dogma of his day. Accepting as we must the critical limitations of his work, we must consider the descriptions which he gives of the Jewish Christians.

2

The island of Cyprus is an important center in the history of the spread of primitive Christianity. One of the most important of the early missionaries, Barnabas, is described as a native of Cyprus, a man of wealth, who sold his property and joined the communal circle of disciples. (Acts 4:36f.) After the death of Stephen when the Jewish converts were scattered, it was reported that some of them travelled as far as Cyprus preaching the Word. Cyprus was the first scene of the missionary activity of Paul and Barnabas on what has been called the "first missionary journey." Here occurred their dispute with Elymas which resulted in the conversion of the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus. (Acts 13:4-12) Then after Paul and Barnabas part

company, Barnabas disappears from history as he and Mark return to Cyprus. (Acts 16:39) This reference in Acts would indicate that a community of Christians of the primitive Jewish church was known to have existed in Cyprus, but nothing further is related of its history or fate. In the Jewish uprising of A.D. 115, the Jews of Cyprus joined with their fellow Jews in the general revolt throughout the eastern end of the Mediterranean, which was put down with considerable bloodshed. It is reported that all of the Jews of Cyprus were killed, and that a law was then enacted prohibiting a Jew from setting foot on the island, even if he were shipwrecked nearby.¹ It is not known when this act was repealed or fell into disuse, but the Jews did return to the island and by the fourth century there was again a large Jewish community in Cyprus.

As the church expanded following the Peace of Constantine, the Christian Church of Cyprus became an important center. When Epiphanius became Bishop of Salamis and Metropolitan of the island, the church of Cyprus was divided into twenty dioceses. If this figure is accurate, the size of the island might indicate that the Christian community of Cyprus may not at this time have developed far

¹ S. Grayzel, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), p. 180.

from the monepiscopate form of organization. The Church of Cyprus was orthodox in its practice and doctrine, and Epiphanius was renowned as a vigorous if uncritical defender of the faith.

We have referred above to Epiphanius' study of heresies, the Panarion, in which he describes all of the heresies known to him. In it, he discusses in considerable detail Jewish Christianity, but as an heretical movement. He is evidently the first to make a clear-cut distinction between Ebionites and Nazarenes. There is no reason to doubt that Epiphanius is accurate when he recognizes several separate movements of Jewish Christianity. We have seen that these names, especially Ebionites and Nazarenes, had been used before, and Jerome, a much more reliable contemporary,¹ also uses them. Hort is of the opinion that there is no evidence for assuming that these were two distinct communities,² but evidence seems to indicate that such a division is in accord with the facts.

It is probable that in the discussion of the Ebionites, Epiphanius was using firsthand information. There is every reason to believe that his references indicate that there was an Ebionite community in existence on the

¹Jerome, Epistle, 112, 113.

²Hort, op. cit., p. 119.

island of Cyprus, with which he was personally acquainted.¹
 This is also the interpretation that Lietzmann makes, and
 he feels that in this Epiphanius is to be trusted more than
 in some other sections of his work.² Hort is quite correct
 in concluding that the origin of the terms Ebionites and/or
 Nazarenes is totally without record.³ Epiphanius' account,
 which says that the Ebionites were founded by an individual
 by the name of Ebion, is almost certainly in error. Al-
 though Epiphanius is familiar with the Hebrew meaning of
 the word Ebionite, which signifies the poor, he insists
 that it was the proper name of one Ebion. Epiphanius
 speaks at considerable length of Ebion and with great de-
 tail, describing him as a contemporary of the apostle
 John of Ephesus, who regarded Ebion as a blasphemer.

This sect of Ebionites, according to Epiphanius,
 used a gospel that he describes as the Gospel According
 to the Ebionites.⁴ There is considerable confusion as to
 whether he means the same document as the Gospel Accord-
 ing to the Nazorenes to which he refers elsewhere in his
 book, but in all probability it is not, although both were
 identified by Epiphanius as Hebrew originals of canonical
 Matthew. Dibelius is of the opinion that this gospel was

¹Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 18, 1.

²Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 251.

³Hort, op. cit., p. 200.

⁴Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 3, 7.

in Greek, but his evidence is inconclusive.¹ In the same passage, Epiphanius states that his Ebionite reporter informed him that the Ebionites were also familiar with the Gospel of John and the Acts of the Apostles, both of which were mutilated as was their "Gospel according to Matthew." He also indicates that they had some other literary works. The Steps of James,² to which we have previously referred as a source of the Clementines, was regarded very highly by the Ebionites according to Epiphanius.

From this account we may infer that the Ebionites held an adoptionist Christology. Jesus, as a man, was enveloped by the Holy Ghost, although Epiphanius is not clear as to whether this occurred at baptism or at some other time. In other references, Epiphanius seems to state that the Ebionites regarded Jesus as an archangel who has reputedly come to earth, first as Adam, then as the Agent who appeared to the patriarch, and later his last appearance as the crucified Jesus. Apparently the Ebionites rejected the prophets and the Jewish sacrificial system. They were regarded as being vegetarian. It is likely that this community would have been influenced by the Essenic sectarians of Judaism. There is no clear reference to their attitude toward the Torah or the oral Law except that they followed

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²Dibelius, op. cit., p. 78.

²Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 10, 6-9.

the practice of circumcision.

Epiphanius is clear in his identifying this group with a form of Judaism. In discussing the organization of their community, he observes that they reject the term ekklesia and use the word synagogue. Harnack is of the opinion that this is an error on the part of Epiphanius,¹ but there is no reason to suppose that the Jewish Christians would have rejected the term synagogue. Indeed, it is one of the surprises of the history of Christianity that this term was rejected by the church in favor of ekklesia. We know that at least once in the New Testament, the Christian community is described as a synagogue. (James 2:2)

In the Ebionite church organization, Epiphanius states that there are presbyters and synagogue rulers.² The Ebionites of whom he writes were bitterly opposed to Paul. This is apparently a characteristic of Judaism and Jewish Christianity. He describes their tradition concerning Paul: he was born of pagan parents, and coming to Jerusalem fell in love with and sought to marry the daughter of the high priest. To accomplish this, he became a proselyte. Then, when he was denied her, he grew wrathful and started to write against the circumcision.³ The Ebionites apparently

¹ A. Harnack, The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), p. 16.

²Epiphanius, op. cit., XXX 18.

³Ibid., XXX 16.

commemorated the Lord's Supper using bread and water, and this may indicate some connection with Essenism. Also, they gave chief place to Matthew rather than to Peter.

This is about all that one can conclude about the Ebionites from the account of Epiphanius. We do not know of their attitude toward the Sabbath or Sunday conflict, but inasmuch as it is not mentioned by Epiphanius it may be that they did observe Sunday. Epiphanius is of the opinion that the Ebionites with whom he was familiar had degenerated even from the low level of their founders, and had become corrupted with the additions of many of the concepts of the disciples of Elxai. While Epiphanius makes it clear that this movement is heretical, he does not regard it as of any great importance. It is more of a curiosity than a threat to the church.

Epiphanius also discusses a sect which he called the Nazorenes. It does not appear that here he was dealing with firsthand information, but probably his account of this sect is based on the earlier works of Apollinaris of Laodicea. Shires has checked closely the references of Epiphanius concerning this movement, and he is of the opinion that Epiphanius' account of the Nazorenes is reliable.¹ Epiphanius states that this sect, which had its

¹ Shires, op. cit., pp. 30f.

origin in Perea, was to be found in Beroea in Coele-Syria¹ and in the Decapolis and in Basanitis in Cochara. This is in agreement with Jerome who also reports them to be in these same areas. With unusual modesty, Epiphanius remarks that he cannot report concerning their Christology.

But concerning Christ, I cannot say whether they also, weighed down by the wickedness of the aforementioned disciples of Cerinthus and Merinthus, deem him mere man, or, as the truth is, firmly hold him to have been generated through the Holy Spirit from Mary.²

It would appear that the Nazorenes of whom Epiphanius wrote are similar in doctrine to the Ebionites of Irenaeus. They spoke "Hebrew,"³ i.e. Aramaic, and they used the Old Testament including the Law, Prophets, and Writings, and observed the Jewish Law. They had a Gospel which Epiphanius describes as a complete Hebrew version of Matthew, which he refers to as the Gospel According to the Hebrews. There is some question as to whether this can be identified as the gospel which was in use by the Ebionites. Most authorities are of the opinion that they were not identical, although they admit the possibility that the Gospel of the Ebionites was, as Epiphanius inferred, a mutilated copy.⁴ It must be observed, however,

¹ Epiphanius, *op. cit.*, XXIX 7.

² *Ibid.*, XXIX 7.

³ *Ibid.*, XXIX 7, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XXX 13, 2.

that the references by this author are generally unreliable. While it is possible that he had seen a copy of the gospel used by the Ebionites, he makes no claim to have seen the work that was used by the Nazorenes. We cannot press these conclusions too far. Epiphanius would seem to regard the Nazorenes somewhat as an arrested stage of Christianity.

In this alone they differ from Jews and Christians: not according with the Jews on account of their believing on Christ and not agreeing with Christians on account of their being still fettered by the Law both of circumcision and of Sabbath and of other things.¹

He remarks that originally all followers of Jesus were called Nazorenes and only later came to be called Christians. The Nazorenes are also opposed and hated by the Jews who curse them three times a day in the synagogue saying:

May God accurse the Nazorenes.²

This would indicate a reference to the Twelfth Benediction of the Eighteen Benedictions to which we have previously referred.³

With the following words Epiphanius dismisses the question of Jewish Christianity:

But having judged this heresy as a feeble and on

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¹Ibid., XXIX 7.

²Ibid., XXIX 9.

³See page eighty-one above.

account of the poison a pain producing wasp's nest and having crushed it down with the words of truth let us go on to the next.¹

¹ Epiphanius, op. cit., XXIX 9.

CHAPTER VI
JEROME AND THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS

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Jerome, who was one of the outstanding scholars of the Christian Church, was a younger contemporary of Epiphanius. His dates are 347 to 420. With him, we come to the clearest reference to the Jewish Christian movement as it existed in the beginning of the fifth century. While collecting material for his Latin version of the Bible during the years he lived in Palestine, he visited most of the centers of Christianity in the eastern world and resided for many years in a monastic community in Bethlehem. As a Biblical scholar, he was especially interested in securing information that would assist him in preparing his version of the Bible, the Vulgate, which is still regarded as the ultimate source of authority for the Roman Church. Jerome has failed to mention many details of the organization and doctrine of the Jewish Christians, which we would like to know. However, he has preserved much of what would otherwise be lost to us.

In his brief biographical sketch of St. Mark, Jerome remarks that the primitive Christian Church of Alexandria, founded by St. Mark, was regarded by Philo, the renowned Jewish scholar, as a Jewish institution. Philo

wrote a book praising their manner of life as a credit to the Jewish nation. This book, De Vita Contemplativa is now denied Philonic authorship by many. Also, it cannot be said with assurance that this book is concerned with the Christian movement. This account by Jerome of the establishment and history of the Christian community of Alexandria¹ is not substantiated by any record, and the traditions which he preserves are not generally regarded as historical. This account of Jerome must be taken as reflecting the tradition and legends current in his own time.

Concerning the Jewish Christian movement in Palestine, Jerome speaks with more authority. Evidently he had visited a Jewish Christian community at Beroea and was quite familiar with it. According to his numerous accounts, this group, which he calls Nazarene, occupied a somewhat orthodox doctrinal position following much of the practices described by Justin. They had made some "progress in the recognition of the Virgin Birth," and had a more friendly attitude toward the gentile church. Jerome also mentions that the Nazarene group had accepted the apostleship of Paul, or in other words Christians of

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Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, VIII.

Jewish origin who had become imbued with Pauline ideas.¹
 He also mentions that Nazarene communities existed in the
 wilderness of Chalcis east of Antioch.²

In the writings of Jerome, there is some difficulty
 in distinguishing between the Nazarenes and Ebionites. His
 references are such that it is not clear if he is referring
 to two distinct sects. Many students are of the opinion
 that he is using these terms synonymously.³ In earlier
 Christian literature, Ebionite seems to have been the com-
 mon term for the Jewish Christians. Some have therefore
 assumed that Jerome used the term Nazarene to refer to a
 small and isolated sect that he found at Beroea.⁴ The
 evidence of Epiphanius, as substantiated by Jerome,⁵ would
 indicate that there were at least two movements within
 Jewish Christianity. While it is not clear that these
 movements had self-consciously assumed names to distin-
 guish themselves, there is no evidence to indicate that

¹ Jerome, Commentary on Isaiah, III, ix, 1; Commen-
 tary on Ezekiel, XVI, 16.

² Jerome, Dialogue Against Pelagius, 3, 2; Epistles,
 CXX 8, 2.

³ A. Harnack, History of Dogma (Boston: Little,
 Brown and Company, 1902), p. 301; Hort, op. cit., p. 199.

⁴ A. Schmidtke, Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen,
 zu den Judenchristlichen Evangelien (Leipzig: 1911), p. 250;
 F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The History of the Christian Church
 (Chicago: Blessing Company, 1927), p. 142 (note).

⁵ Jerome, Commentary on Isaiah, V 18, LIII 5, and
passim; Tertullian, Against Heresies, IV 8.

they had divided to a point where names could be applied to them.

Of special interest to us is Jerome's record of the Gospel According to the Hebrews, which he reports having seen and translated in the library at Caesarea.¹ We have referred to this Gospel According to the Hebrews above. His references would indicate that this work was in general circulation among the Nazarenes.

I also had an opportunity of copying it afforded² me by the Nazarenes who use the book, at Bercoea.

His references formed the skeletal outline for the reconstruction of this work by Parker.³ It may be noted that this work, as it now remains, does not contribute much to our understanding of the Jewish Christian community known as Nazarene, beyond the fact that this group was evidently closer to the orthodox catholic position than many have assumed. For at first, Jerome accepted their gospel as the Hebrew original of the canonical Matthew,⁴ although later he apparently modified his position because of the evidence of many differences which he found in the text.⁵

Jerome, among others, witnesses to the fact that

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Jerome, *Of Illustrious Men*, III.

²Listed in James, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³Pierson Parker, "A Partial Reconstruction of the Gospel According to the Hebrews," Thesis, 1934.

⁴Jerome, *op. cit.*, III.

⁵Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, XII 13.

the Jews reviled all Christians under the name Nazarene,¹ but it is still a matter of question as to whether the Jews were here concerned with gentile Christians, whom apparently they regarded as a totally foreign movement, or with the apostate or heretical Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

Jerome refers to Eustathius, who died in 377, as the first Bishop of Beroea who was later translated to Antioch.² However, he makes no reference to the relationship between this bishop, who had a distinctively Greek name, and the Nazarene community in that area. We can only assume, that since it was not until the fourth century that the episcopacy was established in that locality, that the Jewish Christian community did not include the office of bishop in their church organization.

Beyond these brief allusions, we cannot procure from Jerome any information concerning the Jewish Christian movement. Unfortunately for our study he was not concerned with this aspect of church history, and therefore did not give the details we would like to have.

¹Evidence cited in Shires, op. cit., p. 23.

²Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, LXXXV.

CHAPTER VII
THE DECLINE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

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It is significant to note that the references of Jerome and Epiphanius mentioned above are the last definite allusions to the Jewish Christian movement by any western scholars. The Church of the West was familiar with the history of the Jewish Christians, and continued to apply the term Jewish or Judaizing as a term of condemnation of unorthodox movements. For example, the Nestorians¹ were charged with being Ebionitic.

However, even though there is no evidence that would give us insight into the subsequent history of a specifically Jewish branch of Christianity, there is no reason to postulate a sudden violent termination of the movement. Moore has said that:

To the middle or end of the fourth century some of them conserved their original beliefs with little change.²

In their continuing existence, they lived side by side with their Jewish brothers. Grant is of the opinion that the relationship between the Jews and Christians was relatively amicable.

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²Harnack, op. cit., I, 292.

²G. F. Moore, History of Religions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), II, 147.

As far as the later history is concerned, the relations between Jews and Christians in the East remained friendly for at least five centuries, probably down to the Mohammedan conquest.¹

There is some evidence, that at least in the earlier period there was considerable hostility. The tone of the Fourth Gospel would indicate that there was a Jewish Christian controversy. The martyrdom of Polycarp shows the Jews as the instigators of the riot, which led to the death of that venerable saint. Likewise, the inclusion of the Twelfth Benediction in the synagogue service was clearly a move on the part of the rabbis to exclude the minim (Jewish Christians) from the synagogue.

Following the war of 135, the Jews were in a process of withdrawing within themselves and were apparently little concerned with other groups. Marmorstein has traced in later Jewish literature the Jewish attitude toward the Jewish Christians.

(The Jewish Christians) lived and thought as Jews and were attacked by their fellow Christians as Jews and by the Jews as apostates.²

From the references he cites in this article, it would appear that the rabbis differed markedly in their attitude toward the minim,³ some apparently being quite friendly

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Grant, op. cit., p. 215.

2Marmorstein, op. cit., p. 223.

3Ibid., pp. 223ff.

and others violently hostile. It is significant that references to Christianity and especially Jewish Christianity are very rare in Talmudic literature. While some have attributed this to medieval censorship, the best remaining documents indicate that Jewish Christianity was of no more concern to the rabbis than it was to the Fathers of the Catholic Church.

In the West, as we have seen, the last known Jewish Christian community was that described by Epiphanius on the island of Cyprus. Lietzmann says of it:

Hence we find in Cyprus the last remains of the separated Jewish Christianity still living a vegetative life toward the end of the fourth century, and apparently it was not much different from the strange church in Beroea and other relics in the east.¹

If we accept the anti-Judaistic tone of the Johanne literature as indicating the strength of Jewish Christianity in Asia Minor, it is probable that this movement did not long survive the Apostolic period, but was soon overcome by or merged with the dominant catholicism that developed there.

In the East, the Jewish Christians existed in the area east of the Jordan, where they apparently continued to live for some time, in much the same manner as the

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Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 252.

Samaritans have continued to survive in Palestine. After the fourth century, little is heard of them. However, Moore is of the opinion that some of them survived until a much later time, and that it was from such groups that Mohammedanism gained its acquaintance with Christianity.¹ The Jewish Christian Church in the East did not remain static but came under the influence of the Jewish sects which flourished in the Trans-Jordan region, and apparently came into close association with the followers of Elxai. Epiphanius speaks of their corruption of the Ebionites.² The doctrine of the followers of Elxai shows the syncretistic tendencies of these sects containing Jewish Christian, gnostic, and Persian beliefs in fantastic combinations. Such a group may still remain in the sect of the Mandeans of Mesopotamia, whose literature and tradition link them with John the Baptist, and, according to some authors, to the Jewish Christians. Recent studies of their literature, however, indicate that their origin is probably later, and that it is a syncretistic appropriation from many sources. Lietzmann is of the opinion that it has not the slightest connection with primitive Christianity.³ If any shred of Jewish Christian origins

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Moore, op. cit., II, 148f.

²See page one hundred twelve above.

³Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 52f.

are contained, they are so obscured that no clear conclusions may be drawn concerning the early nature or development. According to the tradition of the Armenian Church, that community was of Jewish Christian origin:

. . . from Jacob of Edessa (we hear) that the Armenians, having at first been Judeo-Christians, observed, besides the Biblical law regarding the unleavened bread for the Passover, the laws of Clean and Unclean with regard to their Church, and likewise the Dietary Laws and Circumcision.¹

If this is the case, subsequent history has obscured and masked any Judeo-Christian tendency, and here again there is no clear-cut indication of any continuation of Jewish Christianity. In the sixth century, an Aramaic version of the New Testament was made in Palestine for the Malkite Christians of Palestine and Egypt, but there is no indication that this group was in any sense a continuation of primitive Jewish Christianity. There is at the present time a small group of Jews in Palestine, who claim to be the descendants of the Christians of the Apostolic Age.² Yet here again, all indications are that this is not a continuation of the primitive Jewish Christian Church but a much later development.

In brief, it is apparent that Jewish Christianity

¹ Kohler, op. cit., p. 258.

² See page forty-nine above.

excluded from both Judaism and Christianity, degenerated in confusion and proved unable to maintain itself. It is possible that such of the Jewish Christian communities as survived, merged with syncretistic sects of the middle East, Islam, or returned to Judaism. Many gnostic sects of that area indicated a familiarity with some Christian doctrines which may have been from a Jewish Christian source. In the West, Jewish Christian history after the fifth century is even less certain. Whether it perished by extinction or entered orthodox Christianity by persuasion or compulsion is unknown. Whatever was its fate, no truly Jewish Christianity survived until the beginning of the modern period in which scientific investigation would be possible. Jewish Christianity was a branch, which God did not spare.

CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

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1

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF SOURCE MATERIALS

The primary source of information concerning Jewish Christianity is the New Testament, but in it there is no book which can be positively identified as arising in a Jewish Christian community. The Epistle of James may be such a book, but evidence is equally indicative that it is of gentile authorship. The Apocalypse, while generally recognized as showing close resemblance to contemporary Jewish apocalyptic literature, does no more than indicate the Jewish heritage of Christianity.

While the books of the New Testament are not of Jewish Christian origin, they do indicate the existence of a Jewish Christian community located in Palestine. This is especially significant when we remember that these books were written in a gentile environment and for gentile Christians. The picture of Jewish Christianity in the Book of Acts and the Pauline Letters seems to indicate sizable Jewish Christian communities (Acts 21:20; Gal. 1:22) in which were included priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees. (Acts 15:5)

From the post-Apostolic period there are almost

no literary remains which are accepted as arising within a Jewish Christian community. The Didache, once hailed as a work of this group, is now generally regarded as the product of a church familiar with and influenced by the thought forms and liturgical practices of Judaism. At the same time, it does indicate that its author was reflecting a mixed Jewish¹ gentile condition.

The Jewish Christians had a gospel, the Gospel According to the Hebrews, and perhaps a different work, the Gospel of the Ebionites. Fragments of these have been preserved, but for our present study many portions of these gospels, which might be helpful, are not available. Attempts to ascribe to the Jewish Christian community other works such as the pseudo-Clementine literature are unconvincing.

It is now generally accepted that we are lacking any primary source material for a study of Jewish Christianity. It is by no means certain that the Jewish Christians were literary, as the gentile church became at an early date, but if they had written any books or records, an unfavorable climate and hostile neighbors have destroyed them.² However, recent literary discoveries in Palestine,

¹

² See page ninety-three above.

² See page ninety-seven above.

such as the new Isaiah manuscript, encourage us to hope that evidence may yet be uncovered that will throw light on this Jewish Christian Church.

There are numerous references to the Jewish Christians in the writings of the Fathers of the early Church but the records are incomplete and inconclusive. These writers generally show an unfamiliarity with the Jewish Christian movement, and their references to it are made more in the atmosphere of curiosity than serious interest. Two of the Fathers seem to have had first hand information. One, Epiphanius, has such a reputation for inaccuracy and prejudice that his references in this subject are seriously suspect. The other, Jerome, was interested in a specific field - that of securing literary evidence to use in his Biblical translations - and he failed to record many items of theology and practice which would add to our understanding of the Jewish Christians.

The evidence concerning Jewish Christianity is slight. References to this movement are fragmentary, and many times the historians of the movement are obviously in error, accidentally or intentionally. However, enough remains to enable us to reconstruct a history of the Jewish Christians.

THE COURSE OF JEWISH CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Christianity began as a Jewish movement. The early picture as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 5:12; 3:11; 6:7; and passim) shows a typically Jewish organization. Its members were Jews, and they wished to remain so. They attended worship in the Temple, and Solomon's portico¹ was their favorite meeting place. They remained faithful to the Law, and zealously insisted that Jesus had not come to end the Law but to fulfill it. The Gospels contain many passages, that would favor the Jewish form of Christianity. It is probable that in the beginning the Christian movement in Judaism was of some strength, perhaps both in Jerusalem and in Galilee. From the Book of Acts, it would appear that the early opposition to Christianity was not by the Palestine Jews or by the Pharisees, but by the Hellenistic Jews.

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, the disciples or part of them were scattered, and some of them began to preach to the gentiles. This radical step was carried to its ultimate conclusion by Paul. The beginning of the gentile mission was a definitive step, and the acceptance

¹Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 78.

of the gentile mission by the Council of Jerusalem made the break inevitable. This separation of Jewish from gentile Christianity was early and final. By the time of the deaths of Peter and Paul, c. A.D. 64, the separation was complete. Radical as such a step was for loyal Jews, it is significant that among the Christian leaders it was apparently unopposed.

We now recognize that Christianity owes a great debt to Judaism. It took from the Jews their Scripture, the Septuagint. Christian organization and worship were patterned closely upon the synagogue, and Christianity rapidly assimilated the doctrine of the Covenant that was fundamental to Judaism. Within Apostolic times, Christianity was convinced that it had become in fact the true Israel. Christianity accepted its heritage, and repudiated Judaism. Harnack has observed that:

Such an injustice as that done by the Gentile church to Judaism is almost unprecedented in the annals of history. . . The daughter first robbed her mother, and then repudiated her.¹

Following this separation, Christianity assumes a characteristic form which became alien and hostile to Judaism. We must remember also that Christianity has never

1

A. Harnack, Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), p. 69.

really taken root among Semitic peoples. According to Harnack:

. . . the religion of Jesus has never been able to root itself in Jewish or even Semitic soil. . . In one sense Christianity has really remained Greek down to the present day.¹

Christianity, from the lifetime of Jesus on, has been opposed by the majority of Jews, and has been officially condemned.

While we may assume that there was in the earliest years a fairly widespread movement as described in the Book of Acts, it is in agreement with our knowledge of Judaism before the rebellion of 70, that such a Messianic sect at that time could exist as one of the many parties that were striving for supremacy in Palestine. However, the rise of Pharisaism, following the political catastrophe of 70 and again after 135, put such a sect beyond the limit of acceptable Judaism. At this time there was a group that attempted to remain with Judaism, and yet to accept Jesus as the Messiah. This position has much Scriptural evidence in its favor. (Matt. 5:17, 17:24; Luke 17:14; John 7:10) A Christianity remaining loyal to the Torah is closest to the example of Jesus, and yet it was found to be an impossible compromise. This movement can be traced through several centuries of existence. Yet it was never large,

¹
Ibid., p. 64.

and while it was rejected by both the rabbis and the Catholic Fathers, neither of them was greatly concerned about it as a threat to orthodoxy.

How completely insignificant it (Jewish Christianity) was is shewn not only by the limited polemics of the Church Fathers, but perhaps still more by their silence.¹

This movement existed in several areas in and near Palestine. With the exception of Cyprus and possibly Asia Minor, there is no evidence that it gained strength anywhere within the Diaspora. It had no central authority or core of doctrine, and soon divided into different strains which became sects. This division was largely on their attitude toward the gentile mission, that is, whether gentile converts could be accepted as fellow Christians or whether they too must subscribe to the entire law.

Jewish Christianity apparently existed for some centuries both in the West at least in Cyprus, and in the East around Beroea, etc. The last known references to it are from the last of the fourth and the early fifth centuries, from Epiphanius and Jerome. After this, it disappeared from view, either sinking into extinction or merging with the more dominant religions that surrounded it. Jewish Christianity failed to survive.

3

PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE STUDY

There are many aspects of the study of Jewish Christianity that remain to be studied. First, we should develop from our existing evidence a clearer picture of the theological and doctrinal position or positions of the Jewish Christians, particularly where they diverge from the central stream of Christian thought. One aspect of this problem is especially interesting. Orthodox Christianity inherited from Judaism an interest in apocalypticism which has always colored Christian thought. Apocalypticism in Christianity is attributed to the Judaism from which it developed, yet in all of the literature referring to the Jewish Christian movement this apocalypticism is lacking.

Another area for study is in the relations of Jewish Christianity to contemporary movements in the middle East. What is the significance of John the Baptist in the history of Jewish Christianity? And what, if any, is the connection between the Jewish Christians and the sect of Mandeans who today refer to themselves as Nazoreans, just as some of the Jewish Christians did?

Still another problem which requires study is the relationship between the Jewish Christians and the gentile

Catholic Church. To what extent is Christianity indebted to these Jewish Christians for the Jewish elements of Christianity?

These are only a few of the questions with which a complete study must deal. It is hoped that this paper may serve as a preliminary survey for a more comprehensive study, which will add to our knowledge of the history of the Christian Church.

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